

# *The Historical Trail*

1997



Francis Asbury Sets Out for America

*Detail from Illustration 1, Page 33.*

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Yearbook of  
Conference Historical Society  
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Southern New Jersey Conference  
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## *The Historical Trail* 1997

Yearbook of  
Conference Historical Society  
and  
Commission on Archives and History  
Southern New Jersey Conference  
The United Methodist Church  
Rev. Charles A. Green, *Editor*

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*The Historical Trail* 1997.

Yearbook of  
Conference Historical Society  
and  
Commission on Archives and History  
Southern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

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**Foreword**

Mrs. Miriam L. G. Coffee

*President, S.N.J. Conference Historical Society*

Living is history in action. Every second of life has a past, present, and future. I remember reading the following many years ago: "I do not fear tomorrow, for I remember yesterday, and I love today." This thought can give support through various experiences. *The Historical Trail* reveals these three thoughts in its great variety of articles and pictures.

The Historical Society members really appreciate the booklets, pictures, and other items that various people have sent me this year, telling of their church celebrations. These materials will be placed in the Archives Room at Pennington. Hours of work and research are revealed in these materials. Also, keep all your church records in safe, fireproof storage. They are more valuable than most people think. If you need advice, call the Conference Historian, Rev. Robert B. Steelman, 609-459-1096.

Advertising in *The Historical Trail* is available. For information, call the Editor, Rev. Charles A. Green, 215-824-1452.

Although delayed by technical and financial difficulties, the 1997 issue of *The Historical Trail* should be available at the 1998 annual meeting.

*The Historical Trail* 1997

We are very excited to be granted permission to be the first to print the Asbury pictures by the English artist, Eric Jennings, and have them appear in this issue of *The Historical Trail*. All members receive a free copy. Non-members may purchase a copy if they desire one.

Do not forget to pay your dues.

Great appreciation is due the Rev. Charles A. Green, Editor, for his expertise and the tremendous numbers of hours he has worked in contacting the authors, revising many articles, organizing the contents, and overseeing the printing of *The Historical Trail*. He has to be a man of great patience as well as knowledge.



## List of Contributors Who Have Helped to Underwrite This Issue

*Assistant of Pilmoor and Boardman*

**Margaret Winner**

*In memory of her husband, Howard T. Winner*

*Friends of Captain Webb*

Helena Anderson

Euretha E. Batten

Edward Bergen

Betty and Ray Carter

Howard L. Cassaday

Rev. Dr. J. Hillman Coffee

Mrs. Miriam L. G. Coffee

Mrs. Margaret W. Cousins

*In honor of Bishop Prince A. Taylor, Jr.*

Rev. J. Wesley Day

Mr. and Mrs. Sydney E. Dyer

Gwendolyn H. Evans

Timothy M. Griscom

Mr. and Mrs. Walter W. Heritage

Ray and Betty Hughes

Mr. and Mrs. George F. Klein

Henry L. Lane

Rev. and Mrs. James W. Marshall

Edna M. Molyneaux

Arthur P. Schalick, Jr.

Mrs. Hammell P. Shipps

Mrs. Howard F. Shipps

Mrs. Frank B. Stanger (Mardelle)

Rev. and Mrs. Robert B. Steelman

Dr. Robert J. Williams





## In Memoriam

Rev. Dr. J. Hillman Coffee

*President, S.N.J. Conference Historical Society, 1976-1984*

*Editor, The Historical Trail, 1968-1992*

John Hillman Coffee was born March 20, 1918, in Collingswood to Dr. Eugene and Mary Jane (Nickelson) Coffee. Hillman was the youngest child with five older sisters, one of whom died as an infant. The other four sisters all married Methodist ministers. At the age of eight, while walking down the aisle with his father to join the First Methodist Church of Collingswood, New Jersey, Hillman whispered to his father that he was going to be a preacher when he grew up. He never wavered from that early decision.

Hillman has always loved and respected education. After graduating from Asbury College with a B.A. Degree in 1939, he attended Asbury Seminary for two years. He transferred to Drew Seminary in Madison and received his Bachelor of Divinity Degree in 1943. After doing graduate studies for two years at Princeton University toward his Master's Degree, he attended Temple University, where he did intensive, specialized study of the Hebrew language for three years. He then attended The Divinity School of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia and received his Doctor of Theology Degree in 1959. This was a celebration year in both America and England for the Protestant Episcopal Church. A Bishop from England gave the graduation address, bestowed the stoles on the graduates' shoulders, and presented the Doctor of Theology diploma to Hillman and the other two Doctoral recipients. Copies of the theses of these three were taken to England to be placed in the Archives of the Church of England.

Hillman met Miriam Louise Gray from Ohio when she transferred from Kent State University as a Sophomore and he was a Senior at Asbury College. He waited for Miriam to graduate by attending two years at Asbury Seminary. They were married in 1942. They have one son, John Hillman Coffee, Jr., and four grandchildren. John (Perky), married to Nancy (Hurley), is a United Methodist minister and a psychiatric nurse.

After serving churches for two years as a student minister, Hillman was ordained in 1943 in the New Jersey Conference. He served the following churches: Downer, Bellmawr, Gibbsboro, Highlands, Wenonah, South

Vineland, Camden (Asbury), Westmont, Mount Holly (First), and Beach Haven and Beach Haven Terrace. He retired to Tabernacle, New Jersey, in 1984. At the time of the accident that caused his death on November 10, 1997, he had been a Methodist minister for fifty-six years. He never regretted that decision he made when he was eight years old.

Music has been the great love of all three family members. Miriam and Hillman, together, played seventeen different instruments. Hillman is probably remembered most for playing his musical saw. Travel ranks very closely with music as an important factor in our lives. Hillman had the gift of making friends with people even if they could not understand what each was saying.

Hillman served in a variety of capacities in the conference, especially in the fields of history, missions, evangelism, youth, and Sunday School. He was President of the Conference Historical Society and Editor of *The Historical Trail* for many years.

Hillman's memorial service was held in the Vincentown United Methodist Church on November 13, 1997. Robert L. Marks, the Northwest District Superintendent, officiated. Ronald B. Watts, the Central District Superintendent, delivered the eulogy. Robert B. Steelman spoke concerning Hillman's love for history. Carlton W. Bodine, Jr., recounted Hillman's active participation in Delanco Camp Meeting Association. Wilson Bradley told of Hillman's work with the youth at Asbury United Methodist Church, Camden, when Wilson was a teenager. Hillman's leadership in the monthly hymn sings in the Camden area had a great influence upon the youth who attended. Interment is in Lakeview Memorial Park, Cinnaminson, New Jersey.

Mrs. Miriam L. G. Coffee

*President, S.N.J. Conference Historical Society*



*Editor's Note:* This memorial notice, written by The Reverend Dr. J. Hillman Coffee's wife, is included in tribute to and recognition of Dr. Coffee's contributions to the work of the Conference Historical Society. It first appeared, in a slightly different form, in *Yearbook and Minutes of the One Hundred and Sixty-Second Session, Southern New Jersey Annual Conference (Formerly the New Jersey Annual Conference), The United Methodist Church (1998 Official Journal; Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Southern New Jersey Annual Conference, 1998), Section IX, Memorials, pp. 215-216.*

## Introduction

The 1997 issue of *The Historical Trail* makes its appearance late in 1998. We continue to commemorate the arrival of Francis Asbury in America on Sunday, October 27, 1771. The Conference Historical Society and the Commission on Archives and History sponsored a special event at First United Methodist Church of New Jersey, Trenton, New Jersey, on Saturday, October 26, 1996. This issue of *The Historical Trail* includes texts of the presentations made at that special Asbury Celebration. On the next day, Sunday, October 27, 1996, Saint George's United Methodist Church in Philadelphia observed the anniversary of Asbury's arrival in America, and the preacher of the day was the Reverend Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church. We are pleased to present the text of the Reverend Dr. Yrigoyen's sermon. We are delighted to add to this material an article on Francis Asbury from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, from Salisbury, England, Francis Asbury's home town.

Mr. Eric Jennings, artist, prepared twenty watercolors for the 250th anniversary of Asbury's birth (August 20 or 21, 1745), and those watercolors were on display at Salisbury Methodist Church, Salisbury, England. The Reverend Dr. Frederick V. Mills, Sr., of LaGrange College, Georgia, who prepared a survey of published works on Francis Asbury for the 1996 issue of *The Historical Trail*, first alerted us to the existence of these watercolors. After some correspondence, telephone calls, and much delay, we are able to bring these watercolors to our readers. We extend our most hearty thanks to Mr. Eric Jennings, artist, and to Salisbury Methodist Church (Salisbury, England), for their cooperation and assistance in making these watercolors available to our readers. In addition to painting the watercolors, Mr. Jennings kindly supplied a commentary on them and did much additional research in order to enable us to cite sources for most of the scenes depicted in the pictures. Both in New Jersey and in Salisbury, there is excitement and gratitude for the trans-Atlantic collaboration that has made this project possible.

A brief word of explanation may be appropriate for our patient readers who had hoped to see *The Historical Trail* 1997 in 1997. Inadequate response to our requests for financial assistance with the publication of the watercolors made their publication impossible in 1996. We had received what we thought were sufficient assurances from friends and potential advertisers, to enable us to plan for publication. But the assurances turned to disappointment to such an extent that publication of the watercolors was not possible in 1996. During 1997 the Editor lost several weeks because of illness in the family, and publication of *The Historical Trail* was delayed. As we came to the end of 1997, however, we found that budget surplus and assistance from friends would enable us to publish the Asbury watercolors. Mr. Eric Jennings, the artist, generously extended the previously-granted permission, and we began anew to plan for publication of these pictures. Continued family illness, along with some eye problems of our own, delayed publication through most of 1998, until we are just now able to send this issue to press. There will be a 1998 issue of *The Historical Trail*, but it may not appear until after the first of the new year (1999). Our readers are invited to read the Introduction to *The Historical Trail* 1996 for some hints of possible material for that issue and subsequent issues.

In 1996 we announced that a new statue of Bishop Francis Asbury had been erected at Wilmore, Kentucky, in 1993. We are grateful for helpful information from Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary, and for permission to include a picture of the new Asbury statue in *The Historical Trail*. We present the picture again in this issue.

Our gratitude is extended to the various contributors to *The Historical Trail*: those who wrote articles or supplied information for articles; those who made gifts toward the cost of production; those who submitted advertisements; and the many who helped with suggestions, information, research, and production. We appreciate the support of the members of the Conference Historical Society, who by their continued interest maintain this publication and the other works of the Society. We thank the many who have assisted in the preparation and production of this issue of *The Historical Trail*:

Members and officers of the Conference Historical Society and the Commission on Archives and History have been helpful and supportive in the planning and preparation of *The Historical Trail*.

Mr. Richard B. Alonso, a Friend, for a variety of helpful suggestions and references, and for assistance in proofreading, editing, and production

Mrs. Joyce Banks, Wesley Historical Society Librarian

Mrs. Dorothy A. Green, for reading and re-reading the material in the issue, and for many helpful suggestions

Mr. Eric Jennings and Salisbury Methodist Church, Salisbury, England  
Kay Bowes, Reference Librarian, Wilmington Institute Free Library, Wilmington, Delaware, for research assistance

InfoServe, the toll-free United Methodist information service

Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, especially the following people, their assistants, and their staff: Rev. Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.; Rev. Dr. L. Dale Patterson; Rev. Mark C. Shenise; Rev. Dr. Robert D. Simpson; and Mrs. Jocelyne Rubinetti, Methodist Library Associate at the Methodist Center, and her staff, for cheerful and helpful service

With sadness we note the passing of the Reverend Dr. J. Hillman Coffee, sometime President of the Conference Historical Society and, for a quarter of a century, Editor of *The Historical Trail*. For many years Hillman exemplified the history and heritage of the Southern New Jersey Conference. We remember his pleasure, in 1993, in being the only living person who had appeared on the cover of *The Historical Trail*.

The legacy of Francis Asbury, and the heritage of The United Methodist Church, are highlighted in this issue of *The Historical Trail*. May our devotion to the God who called and sent Asbury, and the Saviour whom our ancestors proclaimed, be inspired and strengthened by the study of their godly examples.

Rev. Charles A. Green  
Editor





Rev. Dr. Russell Earle Richey

The Reverend Dr. Russell Earle Richey is Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Professor of Church History at The Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. He is married to Merle Bradley Umstead Richey, and they have two children—William McMurry Richey and Elizabeth Umstead Richey. Dr. Richey was born in North Carolina and received his education at Wesleyan University (Middletown, Connecticut)—B.A.; Union Theological Seminary (New York City)—B.D. (M.Div.); and Princeton University—M.A. and Ph.D. His Ph.D. dissertation was *The Origins of English Unitarianism*. Before his appointment at Duke University, Dr. Richey was Professor of Church History at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

Dr. Richey is a member of the American Society of Church History, the American Academy of Religion, the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan Theological Society. Dr. Richey is the author of *Early American Methodism* (Indiana University Press, 1991) and *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1996); and co-author of *Denominationalism* (Abingdon Press, 1977), *Ecumenical and Interreligious Perspectives: Globalization in Theological Education* (Quarterly Review Imprint, 1992), *Reimagining Denominationalism* (Oxford University Press, 1994), and *The Methodists* (Westport: Greenwood, 1996). Among his many contributions to scholarly journals and historical publications, Dr. Richey has written "The Legacy of Francis Asbury: The Teaching Office in Episcopal Methodism" (*Quarterly Review*, Summer 1995, pp. 145–174). In October 1994 he presented a paper on early American Methodism at a conference on Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture at the Wesleyan/Holiness Studies Center, Wilmore, Kentucky. Dr. Richey is an ordained minister of The United Methodist Church and a member of the North Carolina Conference. He has served on the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns; the General Commission on Archives and History; the Commission on Christian Unity of the North Carolina Council of Churches; the Editorial Advisory Board of *Quarterly Review*; and the North Carolina Episcopal–United Methodist Dialogue Steering Committee.

## Francis Asbury A Wandering Arminian

Keynote presentation made at "An Asbury Celebration,"  
First United Methodist Church, Trenton, New Jersey, Saturday, October 26, 1996,  
under the combined sponsorship of the Conference Historical Society  
and the Commission on Archives and History, Southern New Jersey Conference.

Rev. Dr. Russell Earle Richey

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make the response before the Lord your God:

A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into his place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground . . .<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Might we consider Francis Asbury a wandering Arminian? A definer of a distinctive style of Methodist spirituality, an exemplar of a spirituality of wandering, patriarch (in this Old Testament sense) marking out our Methodist response to the divine initiative, a model of a peculiar style of Methodist religiosity? To make so much of Asbury's traveling may seem over-reaching, trivial, hardly the most significant or substantive claim to make about him. To be sure, his traveling and commitment to travel may be what he is and was most known for. But more surely can be made of the man! And has been. We have typically viewed Asbury, as we have construed Washington, as the father of our enterprise. We might have treated him as the shaper of the Methodist connection, of our episcopacy, of a genuinely national itinerancy, of an American church.<sup>2</sup>

I had also thought for some time about treating Asbury in terms of the many roles that he played, particularly in relation to the preachers—exemplar, guide, mentor, teacher, appointment maker, disciplinarian, strategizer, apostle. At one point, I had gathered these under five offices, each an "M" word—mentoring, modeling, ministering, (re)membering, mediating—the latter to suggest his conveying Wesleyan belief, ethos, practice, and commitments to the American scene. I am convinced, as I have argued recently, that Asbury conducted something like

<sup>1</sup>Deuteronomy 26:4–9 NRSV.

<sup>2</sup>For such a reading see the essay by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.

a seminar on the road.<sup>3</sup> I had also made notes to myself and gone looking for information about Asbury in conference, intending to explore how he made use of those collective teaching opportunities.

One other possibility that had presented itself was to visit the various treatments of Asbury, beginning with those rendered while he lived, dwelling on Ezekiel Cooper's sermon *cum* biography<sup>4</sup> and proceeding down to the present. As with Washington and Lincoln, we have gotten "right" with Asbury in every period, lifting up aspects of his life and work important for the day. I am also aware, reminded constantly by my colleague, Kenneth Rowe, of Asbury's darker side—of his compromise on slavery, of his insensitivity to the Germans, of his autocratic power, of his controlling bearing. One has only to read the letters of Thomas Coke or Jesse Lee to appreciate that Asbury's strengths were experienced diversely. His strengths and contributions were many. Why then focus on something so elemental as traveling?

To speak about "A Wandering Arminian: Francis Asbury," will permit me to touch on some of the above, but to focus afresh on what I would think his most commonly and widely known attribute—his traveling,—and thereby on a central attribute of Methodism—itinerancy. I need not go into great detail to remind readers of this journeying, I trust, that this is a recurring theme in Asbury's *Journal and Letters*.<sup>5</sup>

1771

November 19 and 21

I remain in New York, though unsatisfied with our being both in town together. I have not yet the thing which I seek—a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity. However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan, and do what I do faithfully as to God. . . .

At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way.<sup>6</sup>

1780

June 17

I am in peace, and much blest always when travelling.<sup>7</sup>

1791

To Bishop Coke

I have served the church upwards of twenty-five years in Europe and America. All the property I have gained is two old horses, the constant companions of my

<sup>3</sup>"The Legacy of Francis Asbury: The Teaching Office in Episcopal Methodism," *Quarterly Review*, 15 (Summer 1995), 145–174.

<sup>4</sup>*The Substance of a Funeral Discourse . . . on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: J. Pounder, 1819).

<sup>5</sup>*The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark et al., 3 vols. (Published Jointly by Epworth Press, London, and Abingdon Press, Nashville; 1958), hereinafter JLFA.

<sup>6</sup>JLFA, I, 10

<sup>7</sup>JLFA, I, 357 in North Carolina.

toil, 6 if not 7,000 miles every year. When we have no ferry-boats, they swim the rivers. . . .

I soar, indeed, but it is over the tops of the highest mountains we have, which may vie with the Alps. I creep sometimes upon my hands and knees up the slippery ascent; and to serve the church, and the ministers of it, what I gain is many a reflection from both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>8</sup>

1798

Asbury and Coke's Annotated *Discipline*<sup>9</sup>

Some may think, that the mode of travelling, which the bishops are obliged to pursue, is attended with little difficulty, and much pleasure. Much pleasure they certainly do experience, because they know that they move in the will of God, and that the Lord is pleased to own their feeble labours. But if to travel through the heat and the cold, the rain and the snow, the swamps and the rivers, over mountains and through the wilderness, lying for nights together on the bare ground and in log-houses, open to the wind on every side, fulfilling their appointments, as far as possible, whatever be the hindrance,—if these be little difficulties, then our bishops have but little to endure.

We have already quoted . . . many texts of Scripture in defence of episcopacy and the itinerant plan, . . . The whole tenor of St. Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus clearly evidences, that they were invested, on the whole, with abundantly more power than our bishops: nor does it appear that they were responsible to any but God and the apostle. . . . [W]e must insist upon it, that the general itineracy would not probably exist for any length of time on this extensive continent, if the bishops were not invested with that authority which they now possess. They alone travel through the whole connection, and, therefore, have such a view of the whole, as no yearly conference can possibly have.

1812

To Mrs. Ann Willis

I am paid for the desperate roads and 5000 miles riding this year; but hope it will be 6000 next. Only let me retreat at night and I am ready by grace for duty every day. . . .<sup>10</sup>

On virtually every page of his *Journal*, Asbury comments on his traveling, sometimes in weariness, sometimes in pride, sometimes in exhortation, often in detail and specifics. I rode, I rode, I rode. But, it's commonplace.

### Why Consider Wandering?

Asbury's wandering is, at first blush, no big deal. In itinerating he simply followed Wesleyan precept. In itinerating he did what all the traveling preachers did and were expected to do. So why think about wandering, itinerating? The topic surfaced for me as a way of reflecting further about Asbury while listening earlier this fall to Robert Wuthnow, the Princeton sociologist.

<sup>8</sup>JLFA, III, 93; from George Town, S.C.; Sat., Feb. 12, 1791.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 45.

<sup>10</sup>JLFA, III, 465; from Union Campmeeting, Pennsylvania; Sat., Sept. 7, 1812.

Wuthnow described work he has been recently doing comparing the religious outlook of younger Americans, particularly, as I recall, Generation X, with that of older churchpersons. The latter—those in our churches, us—associate spirituality with place—

- with the church building and sanctuary where religious life has long focused;
- with home, particularly if the family took its nurturing and catechetical roles seriously;
- with cemetery where loved ones rested, laid there by the church in corporate worship;
- with retreat centers, camp grounds, Lake Junaluska, Asbury Parks—birthplace for love affairs and deep friendships;
- with colleges where the chapel occupied central place, spatially and programmatically.

The older generations expect, if they have not always achieved, a similar stability organizationally and confessionally. They anticipate or desire to remain loyal to a congregation and denomination. They hold to the beliefs with which they were raised, enriching and adjusting them to suit the new day. They know the ancient landmarks and they revere them.

By contrast, the newer generations, associate their spirituality with movement. They are seekers. With little sense of embarrassment or discomfort, they describe life as a spiritual journey—

- raised Roman Catholic,
- converted to evangelical Protestantism,
- transformed by college into a secularist,
- after college raised into New Age or Zen,
- then interred into Environmentalism,
- now with children discovering the beauties of Anglicanism.

Seekers, they view the spiritual life not in terms of places but as a journey, as movement. They orient themselves *not to landmarks but to signposts*.

Superficially this spirituality of travel looks a bit like that of Abraham, the wandering Aramean. Do I mean to suggest with my play on words, "Wandering Arminian," that Francis Asbury was Generation X, a New Age seeker? Hardly (though I will return to hint that we need to learn from Francis Asbury if we will minister to the younger generation).

### Spiritual Journeys: Three Kinds

The *wandering* Aramean represents but one of three ways of traveling spiritually.<sup>11</sup> Like today's Seekers, the wanderers know not their destination. They tent in one place and then another, making each as much home as possible. They

<sup>11</sup>This typology I owe to Wesley Kort, colleague in religious studies at Duke.

remain nomads, constantly open to the directions from on high. In that openness, preparedness, responsiveness lies their spirituality, garb for the road, relation to God.

A second kind of traveling is that of *quest*. These travelers flee Pharaoh. They traverse a wilderness, whether of foliage or of technology. Their home lies beyond wilderness—in Canaan. There they expect spiritual fulfillment, commandments fulfilled, free and proper worship of God.

The third kind of traveling is *pilgrimage*. These travelers head, whether periodically or only once, to a sacred site. From thence they return home, spiritually refreshed, covenant renewed. The land traveled through—going or coming—is neither here nor there.

### Wandering Arminian?

Asbury and early Methodism combined elements of all three kinds of spiritual journeying and, as I will try to suggest, invited Americans of various races, languages, classes, ages, and both genders to journey to God in distinctively Methodist fashion. And Asbury's successful combining all three, then, made him something of a spiritual tutor for the movement. On the most elemental level, then, Asbury's journeying represented fundamental Methodist affirmations about the religious life. The three kinds of traveling captured central Methodist affirmations.

There are rough approximations of

free will and human accountability	with	wandering,
free grace	with	quest,
holiness	with	pilgrimage.

These basic Methodist tenets, these deeper movements of the human spirit, found expression in styles of Methodist physical motion, in Asbury's and early Methodism's traveling. And that traveling had aspects of wandering, quest, and pilgrimage.

The traveling also—and I cannot develop this point here, don't need to, we all know it—proved remarkably apt for an American society which in its formative decades exploded west from the eastern seaboard. Our circuit system worked and Methodism grew rapidly to be the great Protestant American church. Methodists early recognized the fit, that their itinerating ministry had been providentially supplied for the American environment.<sup>12</sup>

In claiming that "fit," Methodists stressed its practicality and effectiveness. They said less about itinerancy's appropriateness to the deeper recesses of our own religious genius. Both deserve remark. Journeying was doubly providential—

<sup>12</sup>On this point see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), and for a more perverse reading, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).



doubly predestined, the Calvinists would say. It did indeed work, fit the American scene, and in no small measure explain our explosive growth. It also fit the fundamental affirmations Methodists made theologically, though neither Mr. Asbury nor Mr. Wesley fully explored that second fit.

Nor have their followers. We continue to think of traveling—itinerancy—as a tactic, albeit an effective one. But efficiency does not, I think, explain why Methodists made itinerancy one of their central affirmations. In itinerancy Methodists acted out, dramatized, displayed their theological values.

So many aspects of Asbury's and early Methodism's traveling deserve theological explication that it is hard to know where to start or stop. I want to cover three very familiar aspects of our polity, appeal to Asbury's role or views thereon, and suggest how or why these need to be understood spiritually and theologically as journeys. They are

itineration	bishops
circuits	conferences, preachers
class/love feast/quarterly meeting	} the people called Methodists
perfection and antislavery	

#### Itineration: A Scriptural Mandate

"Itinerancy," "traveling ministry," "itinerant general superintendency" have become such code words and commonplaces with us that it is difficult for most of us, I would suspect, to recapture the spiritual force latent with them. On that, however, Asbury certainly made an effort. He did so with the images and valuations employed to image traveling and its opposite—locality. With the one went positive and scriptural terms—as for instance, Apostolic Bishops. With the other went negative associations—as for instance:

I wish to warn you against the growing evil of locality in bishops, elders, preachers, or Conferences. Locality is essential to cities and towns, but traveling is as essential to the country.

On which priority rested Asbury was clear. In the same text from which the preceding came, namely his Valedictory to McKendree of 1813, Asbury labored to show that Methodism afforded the only modern instance of "apostolic bishops."

By apostolicity he did not intend the unbroken succession of episcopal ordinations claimed by Rome and Anglicans. Rather, he intended the continuation of the religious or spiritual office in Methodism that made them apostolic. He made that case by appealing to the work of the Anglican historian Thomas Haweis. Citing him extensively, Asbury insisted that Methodist bishops fulfilled what Haweis described as the apostolic role—planting and watering:

We have planted and watered; although our continent is three thousand miles in length, we have measured it year after year, embracing fifty-one or two districts,

about six hundred circuits, and nine Annual Conferences, all which, with very few exceptions, we have visited.

We are therefore, Asbury insisted, "apostolic bishops; for we have both planted and watered, and do water still."<sup>13</sup>

This leads me to conclude that there were no local bishops until the second century; that the apostles, in service, were bishops, and that those who were ordained in the second century mistook their calling when they became local . . .<sup>14</sup>

My dear Bishop, it is the traveling apostolic order and ministry that is found in our very constitution.<sup>15</sup>

Some of this argumentation, even as intended for McKendree, served apologetical purposes. However, for Asbury, there was, I suspect, something deeply religious about the traveling itself. Certainly Asbury treated it as a divine imperative, for himself and for others. He disdained other evangelical movements, even the closely aligned German bodies, which did not insist on traveling in the same way. He despaired of those who located. He elevated itinerancy over that sacred bond of marriage because it produced locations.

Itineration for Asbury possessed elements of what wandering meant, namely movement itself guided and mandated by God. Traveling, movement, riding, being on the road had an almost mystical quality for Asbury. And the miles logged registered something about the spiritual estate:

July 19, 1802  
New York

At Rhinebeck I made up four thousand miles, and have one hundred in advance towards the fifth thousand I shall have made since the last of July, 1801. Of the little time we have, may be judged by the length of our rides, day after day; yet, at this speed must I go to meet the conferences, and visit the principal societies. My soul is at times greatly drawn out in prayer.<sup>16</sup>

And so, year after year, Asbury measured his wanderings. Superintendency, episcopacy entailed spiritual journeying.

<sup>13</sup>JLFA, III, 475–492, 475, 480; Thu., August 5, 1813, "A Valedictory Address to William McKendree." Several pages into the address, Asbury began to appeal by extensive citation to Thomas Haweis' *History of the Church of Christ*, on the basis of which he posited the apostolic character of Methodist episcopacy.

<sup>14</sup>JLFA, III, 487.

<sup>15</sup>JLFA, III, 491–492. Earlier, Asbury with Coke had affirmed: "We have already shewn, that Timothy and Titus were travelling bishops. In short, every candid person, who is thoroughly acquainted with the New Testament, must allow, that whatever excellencies other plans may have, *this* is the primitive and apostolic plan." Coke and Asbury, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America*, 36.

<sup>16</sup>JLFA, II, 353.

*Circuits: Corporate Pilgrimage*

Asbury's travels, like those of all his preachers, were more than just wanderings. While he wandered to make contact with the Methodist watering places, he also made a circuit to reach each conference, health permitting, and even to attend quarterly meetings when en route. Circuits had something of a pilgrimage quality, a periodicity, a sacred destination to them. For circuits ended in a special corporate gathering, a conference or quarterly conference.

The beginnings of the trips out from conferences and the ends of the trips back to conference had a clearly pilgrimage character. Then entourages of ministers of every rank and station traveled together. This was especially true of Asbury's travels. He traveled with a companion. And as he went along he gathered in those bound for the next conference. They pilgrimaged together. Similar entourages doubtless assembled for quarterly conferences. At other times, itinerants rode by themselves. Yet even on the remote parts of circuits—when lowly circuit riders made their way alone—they knew they had a yokefellow elsewhere on the circuit. And they knew themselves bound for a common destination—conference.

Conference gatherings! These—as I have tried to show—were indeed remarkably renewing, spiritually rich, revivalistic, communal occasions.<sup>17</sup> Something of that Jesse Lee captured in recounting his first conference, that of a 1782 meeting at Ellis' Meeting House, Sussex:

The union and brotherly love which I saw among the preachers, exceeded every thing I had ever seen before, and caused me to wish that I was worthy to have a place amongst them. When they took leave of each other, I observed that they embraced each other in their arms, and wept as though they never expected to meet again. Had the heathen been there, they might have well said, "See how these Christians love one another!" By reason of what I saw and heard during the four days that the Conference sat, I found my heart truly humbled in the dust, and my desire greatly increased to love and serve God more publicly than I had ever done before.<sup>18</sup>

Quarterly meetings were even more decidedly a spiritual destination and even general conferences could possess something of that character. And circuits and conferences linked together to form the connection as a whole—itself a spiritual entity in Asbury's eyes.

So he and Coke could wax eloquent about the connection, about circuits and itinerancy under episcopal direction, explaining in their annotations on the Discipline why they (the bishops) rather than conferences must station the preachers.

<sup>17</sup>*The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 1996)

<sup>18</sup>Minton Thrift, *Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee. With Extracts from his Journals* (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1823), 42.

How could an itinerant ministry be preserved through this extensive continent, if the yearly conferences were to station the preachers? They would, of course, be taken up with the sole consideration of the spiritual and temporal interests of that part of the connection, the direction of which was intrusted to them. The necessary consequence of this mode of proceeding would probably, in less than an age, be the division of the body and the independence of each yearly conference. The conferences would be more and more estranged from each other for want of a mutual exchange of preachers: and that grand spring, the union of the body at large, by which, under divine grace, the work is more and more extended through this vast country, would be gradually weakened, till at last it might be entirely destroyed. The connection would no more be enabled to send missionaries to the western states and territories, in proportion to their rapid population. The grand circulation of ministers would be at an end, and a mortal stab given to the itinerant plan. The surplus of preachers in one conference could not be drawn out to supply the deficiencies of others, through declensions, locations, deaths, &c. and the revivals in one part of the continent could not be rendered beneficial to the others. Our grand plan, in all its parts, leads to an itinerant ministry. Our bishops are travelling bishops. All the different orders which compose our conferences are employed in the travelling line; and our local preachers are, in some degree, travelling preachers. Everything is kept moving as far as possible; and we will be bold to say, that, next to the grace of God, there is nothing like this for keeping the whole body alive from the centre to the circumference, and for the continual extension of that circumference on every hand.<sup>19</sup>

Traveling, one might argue, constituted Methodism as church. Methodism took its adherents on a corporate pilgrimage.

*The Quest: Perfection*

A third kind of traveling Asbury undertook through his preaching, prayers, spiritual counsel, and exercise of discipline. These constituted the purposes of his physical movement and were to encourage his preachers and people from conversion on to perfection. Indeed, one should say that traveling served really the end of cultivating the Christian life. Asbury traveled for the preaching, the prayers, the spiritual counsel, and the exercise of discipline. His *Journal* says that plainly—over and over and over again—I rode and preached, I rode and preached, I rode and preached. The following entry Asbury replicated thousands of times:

June 22, 1780

I rode to Jenkins's and spoke plainly to about eighty people, and found the word was fitted to their cases; met class; it was a day of peace to me; the Lord was with me at this poor, but good man's house. I was kept by the power of God; my soul is breathing after the Lord at all times.<sup>20</sup>

Traveling carried Asbury, as it carried the Methodist people, ever closer to God. A three-fold movement marked the progress. First, there was the move-

<sup>19</sup>Coke and Asbury, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America*, 41-42.

<sup>20</sup>JLFA, I, 359. He was in North Carolina at the time.

ment of the leaders—traveling, perhaps to a class. Second, there was movement by the Methodist people, traveling to quarterly meeting, perhaps a great distance, to stay the two days. Third, there was movement of the spirit, traveling the Christian life, the *via salutis*, marked out by Mr. Wesley.

We have tended to isolate the latter, the way of salvation, the *via salutis*—to theologize it, to reify it, to interiorize it, to spiritualize it, to treat it in distinction from the traveling that made it possible. But one has only to read the accounts of early Methodism to know that the spiritual and the physical, the emotional and the rational, the interior movement and the exterior went hand-in-hand. Something of that is captured in an entry for November 1788:

At Annapessex quarterly meeting I was at liberty on Rev. iii, 20. Again I preached on, "Fear not, little flock," &c.: most of our members in these parts have freed their slaves.<sup>21</sup>

As this entry suggests, Asbury and early Methodism made antislavery one indicator of spiritual attainment. Antislavery measured progress, as did other Methodist rules—measured progress on the road to perfection.

Traveling with Asbury, then, had its cost, expectations, high standards. Methodists traveled with Asbury through classes, love feasts, quarterly meetings—where discipline, accountability, devotion aided one on the way to holiness, to perfection, to salvation. So Asbury and Coke could affirm traveling as "*that plan*, which God has so wonderfully owned, and which is so perfectly consistent with the apostolic and primitive practice."<sup>22</sup> They knew it to be of God. They had cited two pages of Scripture evidencing the traveling plan.<sup>23</sup> Traveling took Asbury, traveling took Methodists en route to the promised land.

### Summary and an Afterword

Traveling, then, for Asbury dramatized a Methodist kind of spirituality, a spirituality attached to basic features of the Wesleyan system:

itineration	bishops
circuits	conferences, preachers
class/love feast/quarterly meeting	} the people called Methodists
perfection and antislavery	

The itinerant life summed up Methodist discipline, accountability, and devotion; it was wandering, pilgrimage, and quest. Means and ends cohered. And traveling imaged that coherence nicely.

In the decade after Asbury's death, Nathan Bangs began the process by which Methodism gave up the traveling plan and located. A slow process, it remains in

<sup>21</sup>JLFA, I, 582.

<sup>22</sup>Coke and Asbury, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America*, 36.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 35–36.

some places incomplete even today. What Bangs wanted, many urban Methodists wanted, a spirituality more like that of other Protestants. A spirituality less of place than of home, of family, of nurture. Bangs wanted proper churches, congregations—not societies and classes. With proper buildings. With preachers who stayed around to harvest after the revival. And who then needed better education. And therefore schools and colleges. And who then deserved parsonages and salaries.

And so under Bangs and his compatriots, we began the slow process of congregationalizing Methodism. Yet another step in slowing the Methodist travel General Conference took in 1996 by authorizing local churches and annual conferences, in effect, to determine their own mission and structure. With each such development, some herald has lifted the standard of Wesley and Asbury, asking, "Has the congregationalizing of Methodism gone too far?"

It does seem *bizarre and a bit sad* that Methodism completes its localizing, makes itself so decidedly a religion of place, just as Americans, or at least the youth and promise thereof, take off on Mr. Asbury's road, and embrace a spirituality of journey and movement.

Might United Methodism need to recover something of Mr. Asbury's spirituality? Might it want to recover a little bit of journeying, especially if it will deal with an America that is spiritually, vocationally, and emotionally, if not physically and geographically, as much in motion, as restless, as mobile—as Mr. Asbury's? Might it want to remember and reclaim something of its ancestry as wandering Arminians and wandering Arameans?



### Joseph Toy (1748–1826)

JOSEPH TOY. His father was among the first settlers of the state of New-Jersey, where Joseph was born, April 24, 1748. As nearly as can be ascertained he embraced religion in 1770, under the preaching of Captain Webb, an officer in the British army, and one of the first Methodist preachers in America. After labouring successfully for some time as a local preacher, he, in 1801, entered the travelling ministry, in which work he continued with much fervour and zeal until the year 1819, when, being worn out in the labour, he was declared to be superannuated, and was settled in the city of Baltimore, where he lived, occasionally preaching as his remaining strength would enable him, respected and beloved by all, till he was called to his reward. He died in great peace January 28, 1826, in the seventy-ninth year of his age. He was, in addition to his having a strong and well cultivated mind, remarkably punctual in attending to all his engagements and duties, whether public or private. At the age of seventy he was heard to say, that he had not disappointed a congregation in twenty years. "His works praise him in the gate."

*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773–1828; Volume I* (New-York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840; Minutes of Conferences for 1826; p. 508.



Mr. Eric Jennings

Born at Oxford in 1917, Eric Jennings early showed an urge to draw and write. At seven years old he drew an advertisement for Shell Mex, a petroleum company. They replied that they were unable to use it at present, but sent a five-shilling postal order to encourage him. Clearly it did. At age nine he wrote his first hymn. Armed with an Honours School Certificate, he entered the Royal West of England Academy School of Architecture in 1934, his profession for thirty-five years, on and off. In 1953 he had been accepted for the Methodist ministry and was pastor of five chapels in Yorkshire, but was permitted to leave because of the long illness of his first wife, who died nine years later. He remained a local preacher and a student of theology. At fifty years old, then a drawing office manager for a large construction firm, he became "redundant" (unemployed); he retrained, qualifying as a primary school teacher with distinction in religious studies. After he retired in 1979, his main pursuits were painting watercolors and writing theology. His hymn "In Celebration of the Rebuilding of a Church" was sung at the reopening of the rebuilt Salisbury Methodist Church in 1992 (see page 32). His landscape watercolors were by then in America, Europe, Japan, and New Zealand. A large watercolor, "A Christian Life," in memory of a Methodist Principal, hangs in the entrance hall of Westminster College, Oxford.

In September 1991 Mr. Jennings realized that Asbury, famous citizen of Salisbury, was almost unknown there. Intense research, aided by Methodist historian Dr. John A. Vickers, reached the ears of Methodist Publishing Houses at Peterborough (England) and Nashville, Tennessee. A year later they sent him one of last few sets of Asbury's Journal and Letters. An Index of Stories and a locally-distributed "Adventures of Asbury" culminated in the 1994 painting of the Asbury Watercolors and Descriptive Panels text. Many Americans visited these, and an Asbury Exhibition, in 1995.

## Adventures of Asbury

The Dramatic Story of a Man of Faith  
Who Set Out from Salisbury, England,  
to Become Father of American Methodism

*Illustrated in Twenty Watercolors*

Mr. Eric Jennings

Salisbury Methodist Church  
*Salisbury, England*

Methodism came to Salisbury in 1744. The remarkable stories of Wesley and Asbury are the historic heritage and a present inspiration for Salisbury Methodist Church, which stands upon their chief Salisbury location. John Wesley visited the city forty-six times, partly to visit his mother, and partly to preach, beginning February 28, 1738. In 1750, preaching in a room over a shop in Greencroft Street at the rear of the present premises of Salisbury Methodist Church, he founded the Methodist society which nine years later bought land and built a church.

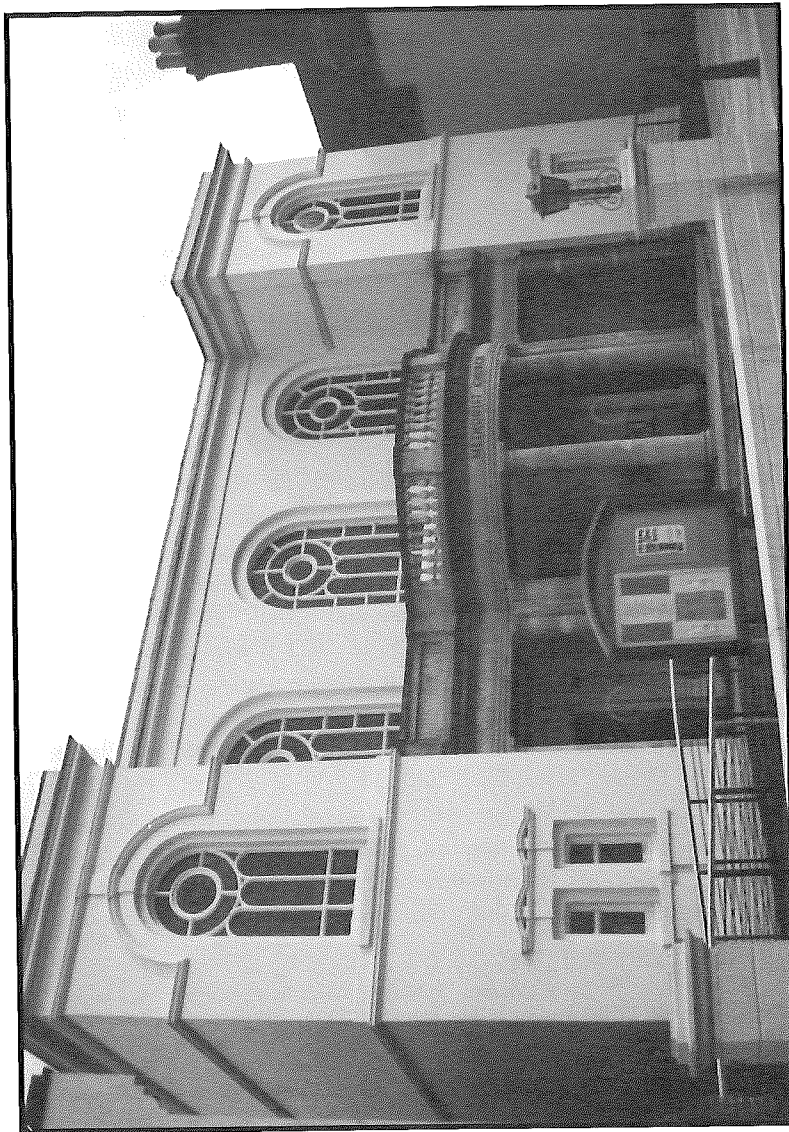
The deeds of the site of the first Methodist preaching-house in Salisbury are dated October 1, 1758, and the first seal and signature is that of John Wesley. Three months later his Journal records: "I rode to Salisbury, and advised our brethren concerning the preaching-house which they are about to build."<sup>1</sup> In September 1759 Wesley preached at Salisbury, and wrote: "The new room there is, I think, the most complete in England."<sup>2</sup> In 1811 it was completely reconstructed. The latest rebuilding in 1992 preserves the original main walls, windows, and ceiling.

The South Wiltshire Circuit in the time of Wesley became very large. It included parts of Dorset, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight. Two itinerant preachers were installed by Wesley—at Portsmouth John Cattermole and at Salisbury Francis Asbury. After traveling twice around the circuit Cattermole gave up, leaving Asbury as Superintendent Preacher. Born at Handsworth, Staffordshire, August 20, 1745, Asbury was now twenty-six years old, a popular

Citations from Asbury's Journal and Letters are from Francis Asbury (1745–1816), *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (In Three Volumes. Published Jointly by Epworth Press, London, and Abingdon Press, Nashville; 1958). Volume I: The Journal, 1771 to 1793 (Elmer T. Clark, Editor-in-Chief; J. Manning Potts; Jacob S. Payton); xxiv + 778 pp. Volume II: The Journal, 1794 to 1816 (Elmer T. Clark, Editor-in-Chief; J. Manning Potts; Jacob S. Payton); iv + 871 pp. Volume III: The Letters (J. Manning Potts, Editor-in-Chief; Elmer T. Clark; Jacob S. Payton); xviii + 603 pp. Hereafter cited as Asbury, Journal, Vol. I; Asbury, Journal, Vol. II; or Asbury, Letters, Vol. III.

<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford: Enlarged from Original MSS., with Notes from Unpublished Diaries, Annotations, Maps, and Illustrations* (Standard Edition; Edited by Nehemiah Curnock; 8 Vols.; London: The Epworth Press, 1913, 1938, 1960), Volume IV (2nd November 1751–31st December 1762), p. 298; Wed., Jan. 10, 1759.

<sup>2</sup>Wesley, Journal, Vol. IV, p. 355; Tue., Sept. 25, 1759.



Salisbury Methodist Church  
Salisbury, England  
Courtesy of Salisbury Methodist Church.

evangelist and an able administrator. The Salisbury church became head of the circuit and the center for the ministry of Francis Asbury.

The Salisbury preaching-house may have provided some accommodation for the preachers, for a contemporary letter of Asbury's reads: "Remember . . . you need only direct for me at the Chapel House in Salisbury."<sup>3</sup> In Salisbury also, he later records, "I had felt for half a year strong intimations in my mind that I should visit America."<sup>4</sup> At the Bristol Conference, August 7, 1771, those intimations were confirmed. Richard Wright (who returned to England in 1774) and Francis Asbury were appointed "to help the work in America." The word "help" was a great understatement, as these thrilling stories of the spiritual heritage of Salisbury show.

### 1. Asbury Leaves Salisbury for the Last Time

*See Illustration on Page 33.*

Asbury rode from Salisbury to the Bristol Conference, and then went to tell his parents the decision to go to America. At Pill, from where Cabot sailed in 1497, Asbury embarked September 4, 1771. He began his Journal: "I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do. . . . If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England."<sup>5</sup> Asbury never returned. During a stormy voyage, with his back to the mast, he preached to the sailors.<sup>6</sup> Landing at Philadelphia on October 27, he was warmly welcomed by the Methodist society there. The "Long Road" of 275,000 miles on horseback had begun.

### 2. Asbury's First American Sermon

*See Illustration on Page 34.*

The next day Asbury preached in Saint George's Church, Philadelphia, which the Methodists had bought, unfinished, four walls and a roof, for £650 in 1769. Chapels or "preaching-houses" were often no more than log cabins, without window glass. During a riot in 1788 "the ladies leaped out at the windows of the church," and stones were thrown through the openings at Asbury.<sup>7</sup> The first recorded "glass window behind the pulpit" was in 1794.<sup>8</sup> Asbury designed many church buildings. He discouraged "holy strife for the highest steeple,"<sup>9</sup> and considered "such foolish additions" a waste of Methodist money. Brickwork, two-storied in 1802, gradually replaced wood-frame construction.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Asbury, Letters, Vol. III, p. 6; Oct. 26, 1768; To his Parents. This letter is the earliest known letter of Francis Asbury.

<sup>4</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 3; Wed., Aug. 7, 1771.

<sup>5</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 4-5; Thu., Sept. 12, 1771.

<sup>6</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 6; Oct. 13, 1771.

<sup>7</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 564; Fri., Mar. 14, 1788; Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>8</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 34; Tue., Dec. 9, 1794; Williams's meeting house, Lunenburg County, Virginia.

<sup>9</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 487; Sun., Dec. 8, 1805; Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>10</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 326; Jan. 26, 1802; Newbern (New Bern), North Carolina.



### 3. Asbury's Chaise Under Fire

*See Illustration on Page 35.*

Fortunately this bullet, fired near Annapolis, missed Asbury himself.<sup>11</sup> In the Revolutionary War, an Englishman was often regarded as a spy. Soon the other English preachers returned to Britain, but Asbury never gave up his mission, despite constant danger of arrest by armed men. Not until 1781 did Governor Rodney of Delaware sign his certificate of American citizenship.<sup>12</sup> In 1778 Asbury realized his presence also threatened the safety of friends, such as Judge White who gave him lodging—they would be regarded as traitors.

### 4. Asbury Hides in a Swamp Until Sunset

*See Illustration on Page 36.*

The threat became a tragic fact. On April 2, 1778, Judge White was arrested and imprisoned. Among the tearful witnesses was his eight-year-old son, Samuel White, who later became a Senator.<sup>13</sup> Asbury departed; and so as not to betray his friends, he hid in swamps or houses safe from intrusion (one was Governor Rodney's!).<sup>14</sup> During this period of lonely travel he never ceased to preach. Though the judge's persecution continued for a year, the family sheltered Asbury again from November 1778 until April 1779.

### 5. Crossing Flooded Creeks: Bridges Down

*See Illustration on Page 37.*

Asbury tells how "the water kept up the carriage." It floated like a boat. Across deep creeks the horses were obliged to swim "among rocks, holes, and logs."<sup>15</sup> Even when not swept away by floods, wooden bridges—two long poles with short logs laid across like railway ties—entangled a horse's legs.<sup>16</sup> Asbury writes of crossing in a boat once with the horse's "hind feet over the side of the boat!"<sup>17</sup> Next time he laid straw on the deck so that they did not slip.

### 6. Asbury Explores a Cave, and Sings a Hymn

*See Illustration on Page 38.*

In a cave with "lofty chambers, supported, to appearance, by basaltic pillars" and "stalactites resembling the pipes of an organ," Asbury sang a hymn, and found "The sound was wonderful." He writes: "I came away filled with wonder, with humble

<sup>11</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 236; Wed., Apr. 16, 1777.

<sup>12</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 399; Mon., Feb. 5, 1781. Caesar Rodney (1728–1784), a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was President of Delaware (1778–1782).

<sup>13</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 265; Thu., Apr. 2, 1778. Judge Thomas White (1730–1795); his son, Samuel White (1770–1809), attended Cokesbury College and became a U.S. Senator from Delaware (1801–1809). See also Asbury, Letters, Vol. III, p. 48, note 8.

<sup>14</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 265–266; Tue., Apr. 7, 1778; Maryland.

<sup>15</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 367; Thu., July 20, 1780.

<sup>16</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 677; Tue., July 2, 1811.

<sup>17</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 624, note 25.

praise, and adoration."<sup>18</sup> Always on the watch for God's creativity, he believed that God watched too, and records an example "of the watchful care of God over his people. Mr. Peddicord went to bed, but could not sleep, though he tried again and again. At last he was obliged to rise; and going down stairs . . . he found the house on fire."<sup>19</sup>

### 7. Asbury and Companion Sleep on Mountain Rocks<sup>20</sup>

*See Illustration on Page 38.*

The experience in the cave makes Asbury sound like a tourist; the truth is that he was a pilgrim. His pilgrim way was often most uncomfortable. In West Virginia many log cabin houses had only one room, which preachers shared with the family. One was twenty feet by sixteen feet, containing seven beds, sixteen people, some noisy children—and Asbury!<sup>21</sup> "Sometimes," he wrote, "necessity compels us to seek retirement in the woods." In Virginia "I have to lodge half my nights in lofts, . . . the cold wind . . . blowing through [a hundred places] . . . I . . . bear it with thankfulness, expecting ere long to have better entertainment—a heavenly and eternal rest."<sup>22</sup>

### 8. Congregation Becomes a Fire Brigade

*See Illustration on Page 39.*

The Methodists were not only *believers* in Providence; they were its *agents*. While Asbury was conducting a service in 1782, the house next to the chapel caught fire. The service at once became a rescue operation through which the inmates and the furniture were saved.<sup>23</sup> Note the chimney being pulled down, built separate from the wooden house in the hope that if it caught fire the house would not. Fire was a constant hazard in lumber country. It makes a dramatic illustration here—as it did sometimes in Asbury's sermons!

### 9. Asbury Preaches in Playhouse at Bath<sup>24</sup>

*See Illustration on Page 39.*

Bath in West Virginia in 1785 was like its English namesake in two respects. It was noted for its mineral springs and its pleasure-seeking society. Asbury spent

<sup>18</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 407–408; Thu., June 21, 1781.

<sup>19</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 298; Sat., Mar. 27, 1779. Caleb B. Peddicord's name is spelled "Pedicord" and "Peddicord" in Asbury's Journal. Peddicord, who died in 1785, was a preacher of great earnestness and eloquence (William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783–1840*; Vol. IV, The Methodists; A Collection of Source Materials [New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1964, reprint of 1946 edition], p. 9). In the Minutes for 1785 Asbury described Peddicord as "a man of sorrows; and, like his Master, acquainted with grief; but a man dead to the world, and much devoted to God" (*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773–1828*; Volume I [New York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840]; Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the Year 1785; p. 23).

<sup>20</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 417, illustration; 1782.

<sup>21</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 197; Mon., Aug. 12, 1776; at Bath.

<sup>22</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 420; Sat., Feb. 9, 1782.

<sup>23</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 421; Mon., Feb. 18, 1782; at Mr. Almond's, Virginia.

<sup>24</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 548–549; Tue., July 31–Fri., Aug. 31, 1787; and other references to Bath in Index (Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 827).

a month there, using the stage as a preaching platform, and lodging with the actors at night.<sup>25</sup> Whatever situation he encountered, it was turned into a Gospel opportunity. Just over two years later he got a church built "at this place of wickedness."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps he succeeded because, although he denounced the sins of society, he was, like his Master, a friend of the sinners.

#### 10. Startled Horse Throws Asbury into Mill Race<sup>27</sup>

*See Illustration on Page 40.*

Something caused the horse to rear up. Asbury often got a good soaking, through accidents, fording rivers, and braving thunderstorms. He would ride on until he found a homestead where he could dry his clothes, and sometimes his precious books too. Then he would use the opportunity to pray with the family.

#### 11. Asbury's Ferry Nearly Run Down

*See Illustration on Page 41.*

On the James River at Swan Point Ferry only two blacks worked a large boat needing four oarsmen. They were only just able to avoid these two fast brigs in full sail.<sup>28</sup> Asbury records how two young men in a canoe ferried him in rough weather, so scared that "they sometimes prayed and sometimes swore!"

#### 12. Horse and Carriage Overturned: Asbury Thrown Out<sup>29</sup>

*See Illustration on Page 42.*

The Journal records several such accidents. Once the horse and carriage went over the edge of a precipice but were saved by a sapling, bent but not broken. Asbury and his companion pulled them all back "after a pretty heavy lift." "Our feelings were excited more for others than ourselves," they said, as they saw the clothes of another party drying out after a fall into the river.<sup>30</sup> Asbury's concern for his horses was often greater than the attention he gave to his own comfort. "My poor horse, too, was so weak from the want of proper food, that he fell down with me twice; this hurt my feelings exceedingly—more than any circumstance I met with in all my journey," he wrote.<sup>31</sup> The roads were rough tracks, full of mud-holes, with tree stumps and boulders beside them. The trick for successful traveling was to drive half on the grass, avoiding trees on the side and deep mud in the center. Sometimes the way was trackless; but Asbury could "bush it"—bend thin saplings aside and ride through thickets.

<sup>25</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 490; Tue., June 28, 1785; Bath, presently Berkeley, West Virginia.

<sup>26</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 547; Mon., July 16, 1787; Bath, West Virginia; Vol. I, pp. 548–549; Fri., Aug. 10, 1787.

<sup>27</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 769; Wed., Aug. 21, 1793.

<sup>28</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 619; Mon., Jan. 4, 1790; Virginia.

<sup>29</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 174; Fri., Oct. 5, 1798; Maryland.

<sup>30</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, pp. 261–262; Thu., Nov. 6, 1800.

<sup>31</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 429; Fri. or Sat., July 12 or 13, 1782; Maryland.

#### 13. Shipwreck Off Cape Henlopen

*See Illustration on Page 42.*

At the historic Henlopen Lighthouse there was a Methodist lighthouse keeper.<sup>32</sup> Asbury went to the lighthouse and heard how the villagers, and even the crew, looted a ship as soon as it ran on the rocks in a storm. The captain was drunk, and of three hundred on board, only forty were saved. Stricter laws were made to prevent a repetition, "and the people on this shore are greatly reformed; for which they may thank the Methodists," says Asbury.<sup>33</sup>

#### 14. Nearly a Hundred Slaves Peeping In

*See Illustration on Page 43.*

"It was not at all agreeable to me to see nearly a hundred slaves standing outside, and peeping in at the door, whilst the house was half empty: they were not worthy to come in because they were black! Farewell, farewell to that house forever!"<sup>34</sup> Asbury never preached in that church again. The antislavery campaign was strongly supported by Asbury and his preachers, one of whom was nearly drowned by slave owners who held him under the village pump.

#### 15. A Night in the Wilderness

*See Illustration on Page 43.*

They made tents of blankets and cloaks hung over limbs of trees. Asbury slept for only two hours, and was ill for about a month. "M'Kendree had to lift me up and down from my horse, like a helpless child."<sup>35</sup> He stopped for three days. Too weak to stand, he then preached kneeling on a chair. Medicine was primitive. Asbury cured a slave's sore leg with a bread-and-milk poultice,<sup>36</sup> and a horse's wounded leg with a slice of bacon bandaged in place.<sup>37</sup> In 1798 a remedy for his own illness was "an extraordinary diet," one wineglass every morning of a drink made from hard cider, one hundred nails (presumably strained off!), black snake-root, fennel seed, and wormwood.<sup>38</sup> Even so, he was a successful traveling doctor.

#### 16. A Camp Meeting: Trumpets at Sunrise

*See Illustration on Page 44.*

In 1805, Asbury received a report about the success of evangelical camp meetings. "At sunrise the trumpets gave the signal for morning prayer," and for preaching at 8 A.M., 3 P.M., and 8 P.M. The camp contained 189 tents and covered wagons; the preaching stand had a sounding-board roof; the congregation

<sup>32</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 653; J. R. Hargus was the keeper.

<sup>33</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 653–654; Sat., Oct. 23, 1790.

<sup>34</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 326; Sat., Jan. 24, 1802; North Carolina.

<sup>35</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, pp. 364–365; Mon., Oct. 18–Sun., Oct. 24, 1802. William McKendree (1757–1835) was elected bishop in 1808.

<sup>36</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 121; Sun., Feb. 26, 1796.

<sup>37</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 518; Tue., July 15, 1786.

<sup>38</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 149; Mon., Jan. 1, 1798; Virginia.

arrived in one thousand carriages and numbered seven thousand, increasing to about ten thousand. Some two hundred conversions were recorded by nightfall when, with thirty-seven preachers on the stand, the trumpets signaled farewell.<sup>39</sup>

### 17. Dangerous Moment on Green Mountain

*See Illustration on Page 45.*

Asbury writes: "arrived at the Narrows we found the bank had given way and slidden down; I proposed to work the carriage along over by hand, whilst Daniel Hitt led the horses; he preferred my leading them, so on we went, but I was weak, . . . and the mare ran me upon a rock; up went the wheel, hanging balanced over a precipice of fifty feet—rocks, trees, and the river between us; I felt lame by the mare's treading on my foot; we unhitched the beast and righted the carriage, after unloading the baggage . . . . But never in my life have I been in such apparent danger."<sup>40</sup>

### 18. Woodland Service and a Thunderstorm

*See Illustration on Page 46.*

Remarkably we learn from other written records more than Asbury himself knew, or wrote, about this. The open-air service was for Asbury to ordain two deacons, but as it proceeded there was a thunderstorm. William Butler knelt beside Asbury and held an umbrella over him. Asbury himself calmly continued. The deacons were ordained. What Asbury did not know was that his bearing during the thunder and lightning so impressed little Deborah Sutton, standing beside her mother, that it led to her conversion and lifelong faith.<sup>41</sup>

### 19. John Bond Clears the Way for Asbury

*See Illustration on Page 47.*

Asbury, now so ill that he must stay in the carriage, wrote: "Brother Bond sprung to the axe . . . mounted upon the large limbs, hewing and hacking . . . . He drives me along with the utmost care and tenderness, . . . he watches over me at night . . . , and if . . . I call, he is awake and up in the instant to give me medicine."<sup>42</sup> Asbury was himself capable of deep emotion, of compassion, and love for friends, including those he never saw again after leaving Salisbury in 1771.

<sup>39</sup>Asbury, Letters, Vol. III, pp. 327–331, especially pp. 330–331; Letter from William Penn Chandler (1764–1822) to Francis Asbury, from Delaware District, Dover, Aug. 5, 1805. Chandler was Presiding Elder on the Delaware District.

<sup>40</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 538; Thu., May 14, 1807; Vermont. Daniel Hitt (1765?–1825) served as Presiding Elder on several districts; was a traveling companion to Bishop Asbury and, later, to Bishop McKendree; and served as assistant book steward (1808–1810) and book steward (1810–1816); Asbury named Hitt as one of the executors of his will.

<sup>41</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 548; Sun., July 19, 1807; and p. 548, note 84.

<sup>42</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 761; Tue., Oct. 18, 1814; Pigeon River, North Carolina. John Wesley Bond (1784–1819) was a member of the Baltimore Conference. He traveled with Asbury and was present when the bishop died. See Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 756, note 15.

The writing of one letter was blotted by tears where it read: "farewell my Country, my dear friends, oh my dear, my paper! my heart! my eyes! my tears!"<sup>43</sup>

### 20. Asbury's Last Sermon: Richmond, Virginia

*See Illustration on Page 48.*

Unable to walk or stand, he was carried into the church and supported on a table. With frequent pauses to recover breath, Asbury preached for nearly an hour on Romans 9:28, "For he will finish the work . . . ."<sup>44</sup> At four o'clock on Sunday, March 31, 1816, Asbury's earthly journey ended.<sup>45</sup> His adventurous faith had sowed the seed of a harvest ripening still. He wrote: "in 1771 . . . I . . . longed for 100,000; now I want 200,000—nay, thousands upon thousands."<sup>46</sup> There are about fifteen million Methodists in America today!

### The Story Continues

Francis Asbury traveled far from his native land and became the "father" of American Methodism. Trusting in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, he embarked on a pilgrim trail that is well worth recall. In all his life's adventures he had the company of God's Spirit. And all the stories illustrated here are true.

These stories, like all Gospel stories, are not only about the characters there portrayed. They are for us, and for our faith today. They were, and are, Adventures of God, whose Spirit accompanies us also. The story continues yet.

The story continues in you.



<sup>43</sup>Asbury, Letters, Vol. III, p. 409; Tue., May 2, 1809; Letter to Penelope Goulding Smith Coke (d. 1811), first wife (married in 1805) of Bishop Thomas Coke (1747–1814). After the death of his first wife, Coke married Anne Loxdale in 1811; she died in 1812.

<sup>44</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 802; Sun., Mar. 24, 1816; Richmond, Virginia; from Francis Hollingsworth, "A Short Account of His Death."

<sup>45</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 803; Sun., Mar. 31, 1816; Spotsylvania County, Virginia; from Francis Hollingsworth, "A Short Account of His Death." Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 807; Sun., Mar. 31, 1816; message from John Wesley Bond to Bishop William McKendree; from Elmer T. Clark, "Asbury's Last Journey."

<sup>46</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 398; Mon., July 11, 1803.

Signature of Francis Asbury  
(1745–1816)

Written at Wesley Chapel (later John Street Church, New York City), 1771  
From William Haven Daniels (1836–1908), *The Illustrated History of Methodism in Great Britain and America, from the Days of the Wesleys to the Present Time* (Methodist Book Concern [New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis: Hitchcock & Walden], 1879, 1880 [© 1879 by Phillips & Hunt, New York]), p. 368.

**A Hymn**  
**In Celebration of the Rebuilding of a Church**

Eric Jennings

*Salisbury, England, 1992*

You living stones, rise up, cry out,  
For Jesus Christ your founder is!  
See how these walls are built about;  
How great a temple now is his!

Yet here a greater temple stands,  
Built by the love of God alone,  
A house of God not made with hands,  
Where Jesus lives in every stone.

Now fashioned into one you are;  
O living stones, rejoice and sing.  
United now from near and far,  
Cry out as one: Behold, the King!

Come, Living Spirit of the Lord,  
The house not made with hands indwell,  
The stones cast down, raise up, restored  
To serve God's plan, and serve him well.

Then enter, Lord, the house not made  
With human hand, but by God's grace;  
Only your glory be displayed.  
Come, Life divine, and fill the place!

Scripture references: Mark 13:1-2; Luke 19:37-40;  
John 2:19-21; I Corinthians 12:27;  
I Corinthians 3:9, 11, 16; Ephesians 2:17-22;  
I Peter 2:5

Meter: L.M.

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1. Asbury Leaves Salisbury for the Last Time  
*See Description on Page 25.*

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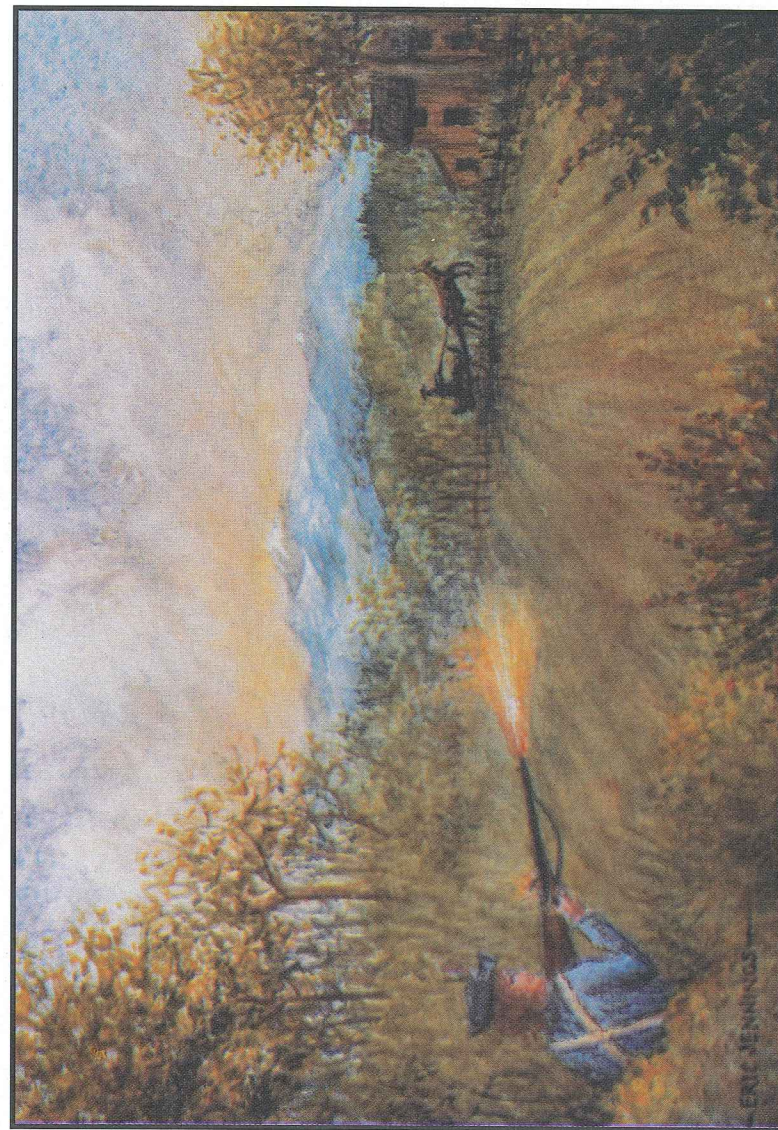




2. Asbury's First American Sermon

*See Description on Page 25.*

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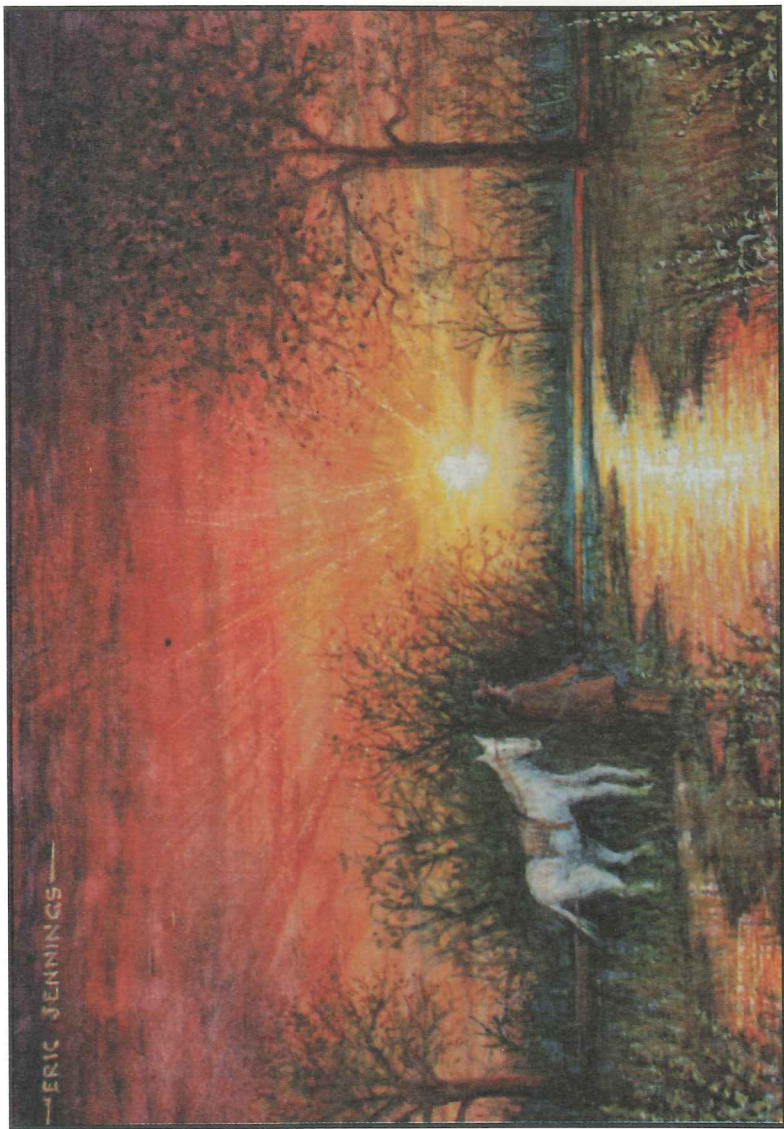


3. Asbury's Chaise Under Fire

*See Description on Page 26.*

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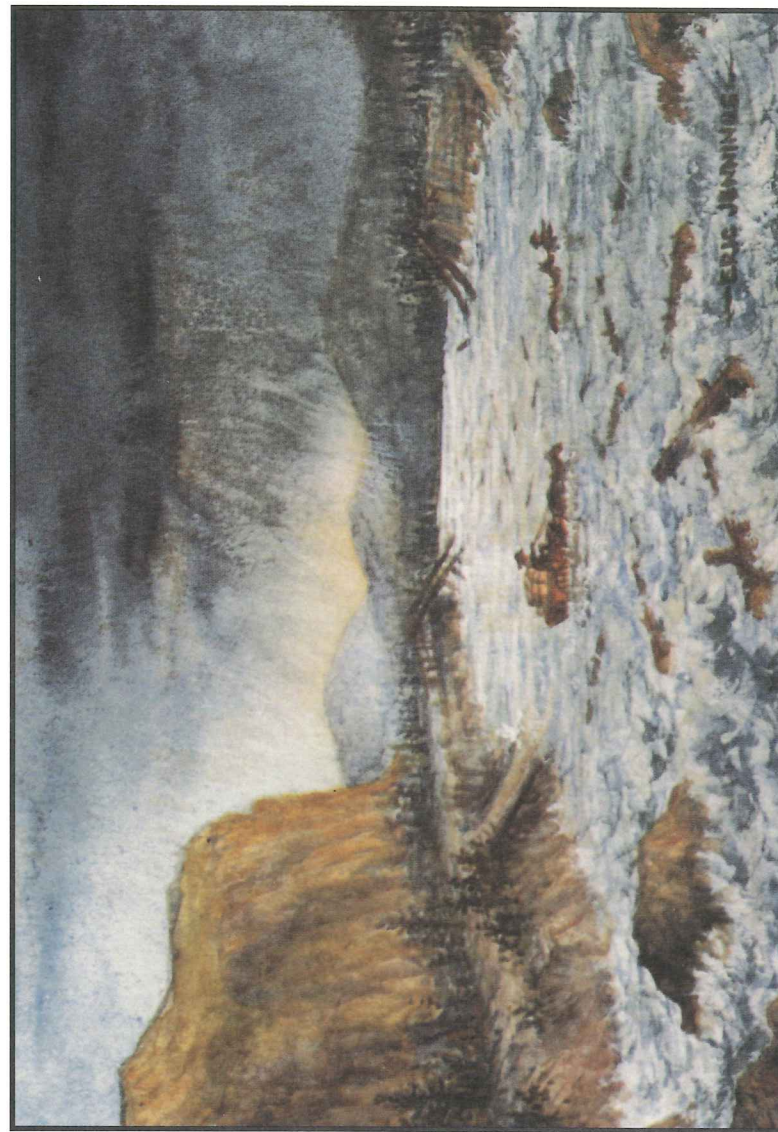




4. Asbury Hides in a Swamp Until Sunset

*See Description on Page 26.*

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5. Crossing Flooded Creeks: Bridges Down

*See Description on Page 26.*

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6. Asbury Explores a Cave, and Sings a Hymn

*See Description on Pages 26–27.*

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7. Asbury and Companion Sleep on Mountain Rocks

*See Description on Page 27.*

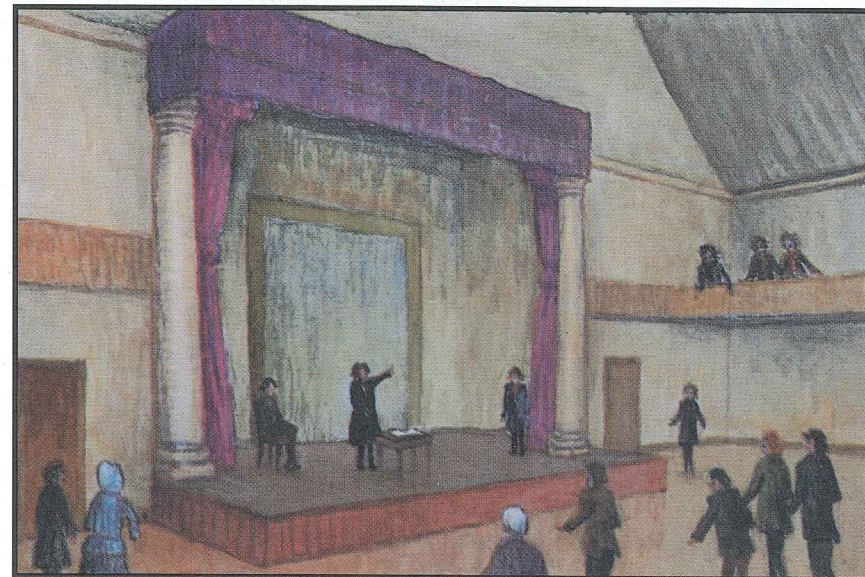
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8. Congregation Becomes a Fire Brigade

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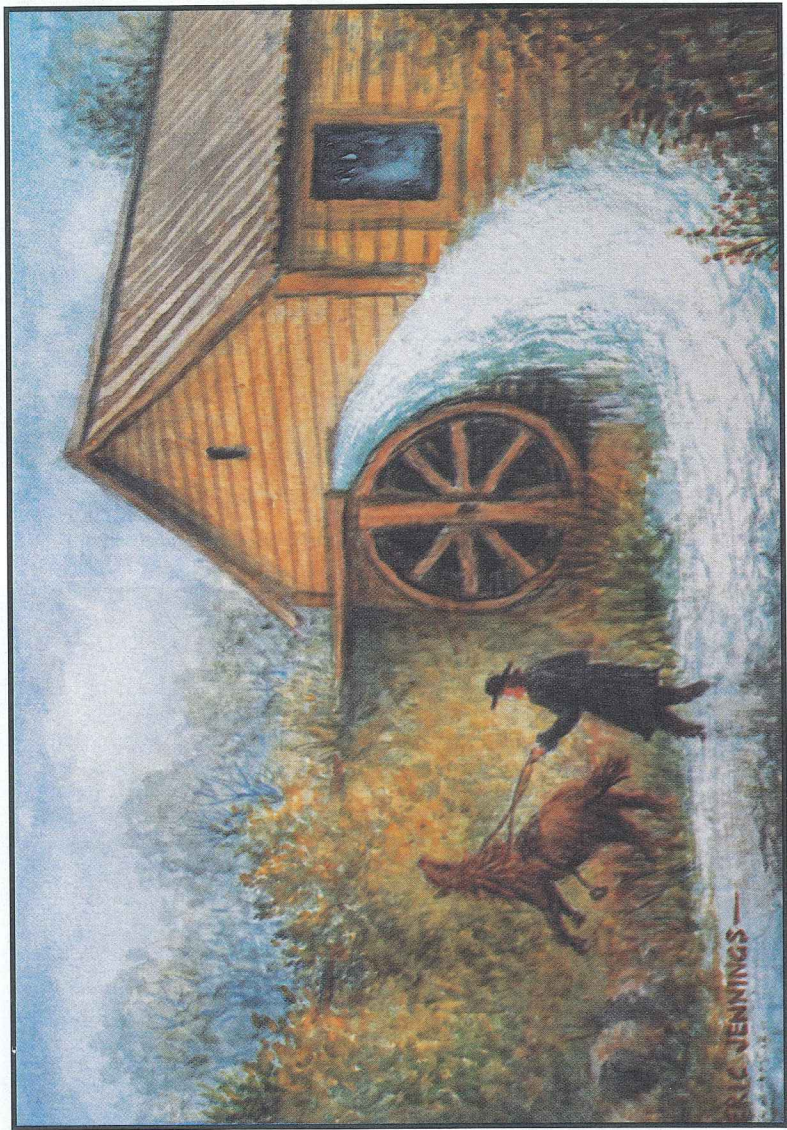


9. Asbury Preaches in Playhouse at Bath

*See Description on Pages 27–28.*

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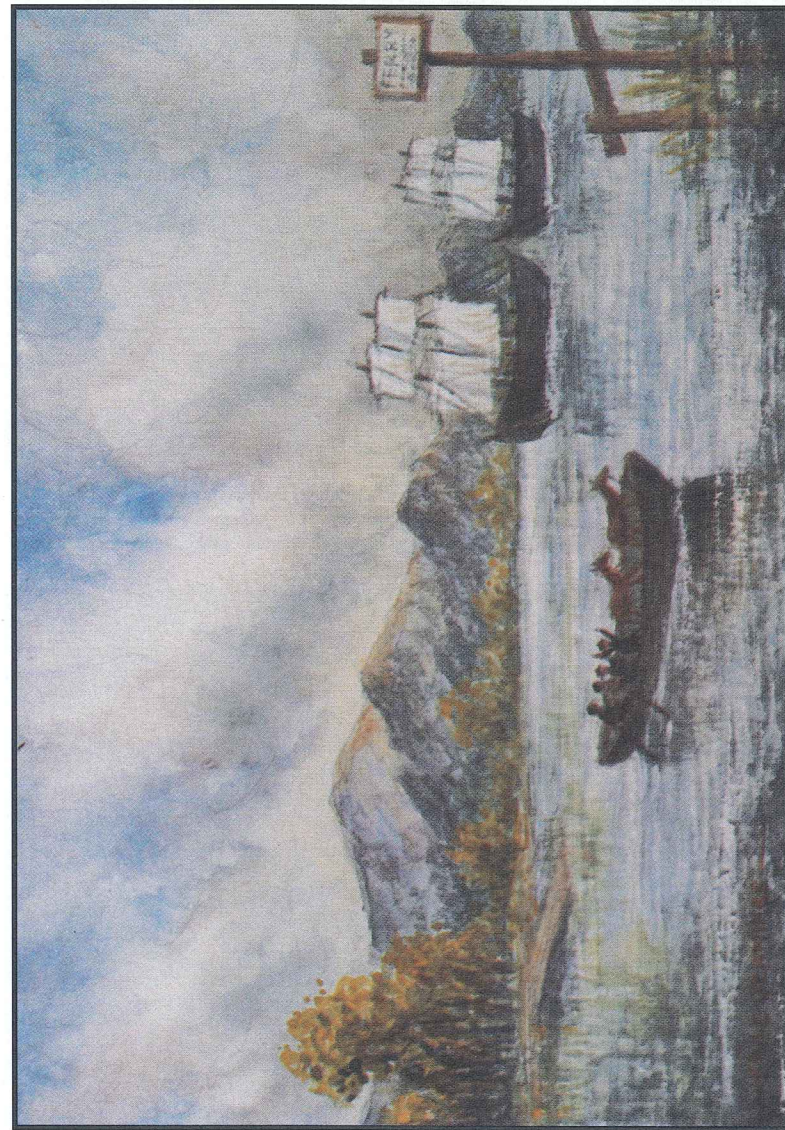




10. Startled Horse Throws Asbury into Mill Race

*See Description on Page 28*

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11. Asbury's Ferry Nearly Run Down

*See Description on Page 28*

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12. Horse and Carriage Overturned: Asbury Thrown Out

*See Description on Page 28.*

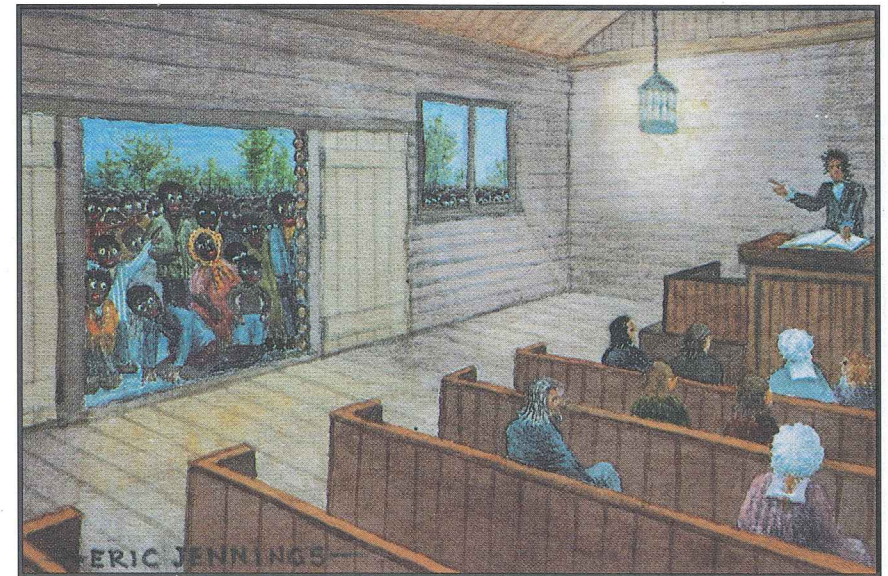
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13. Shipwreck Off Cape Henlopen

*See Description on Page 29.*

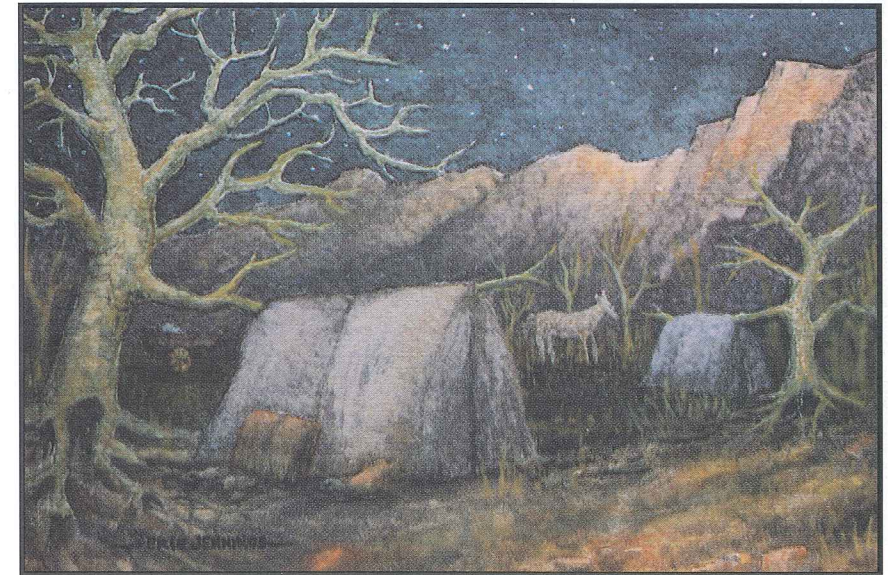
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14. Nearly a Hundred Slaves Peeping In

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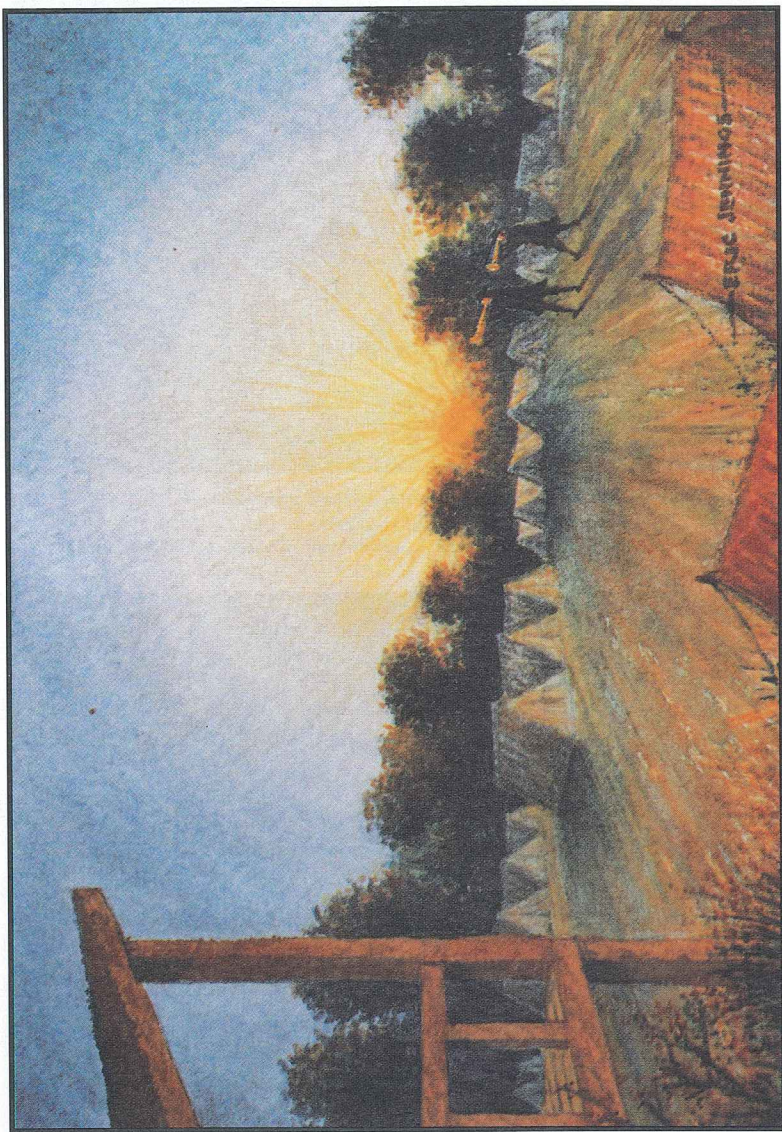


15. A Night in the Wilderness

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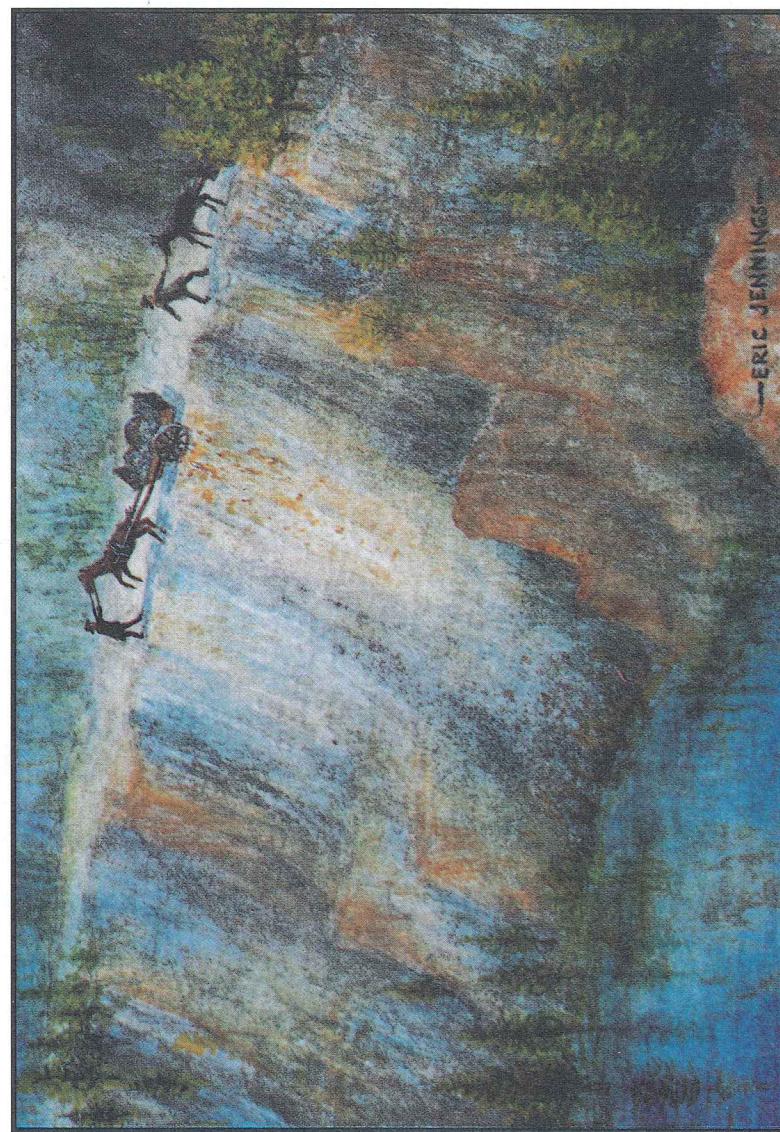




16. A Camp Meeting: Trumpets at Sunrise

*See Description on Pages 29-30.*

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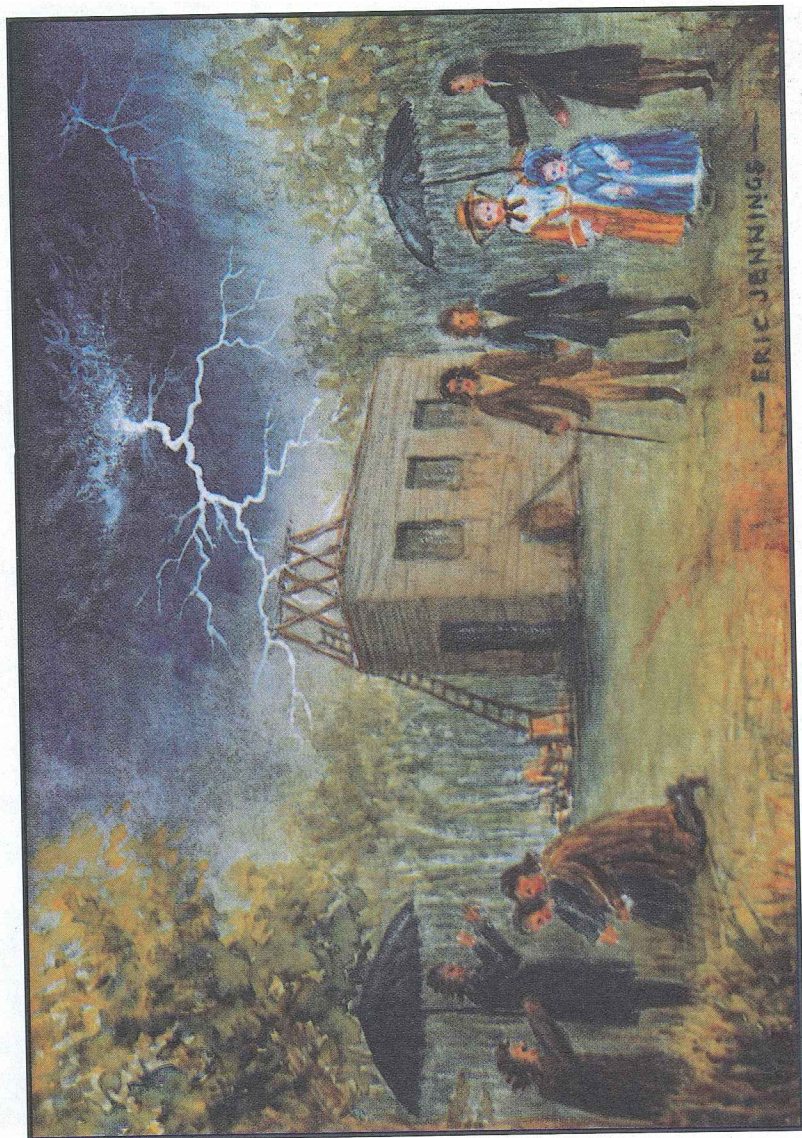


17. Dangerous Moment on Green Mountain

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18. Woodland Service and a Thunderstorm

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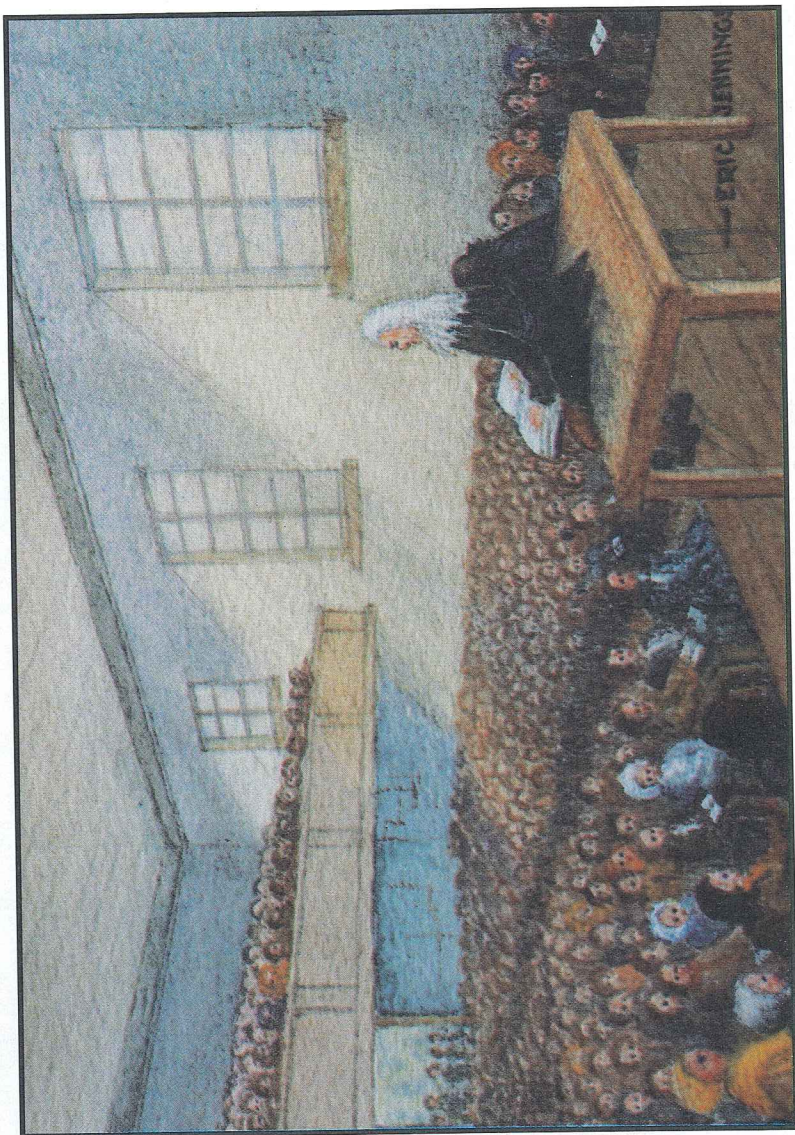


19. John Bond Clears the Way for Asbury

*See Description on Pages 30-31.*

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20. Asbury's Last Sermon: Richmond, Virginia

See Description on Page 31.

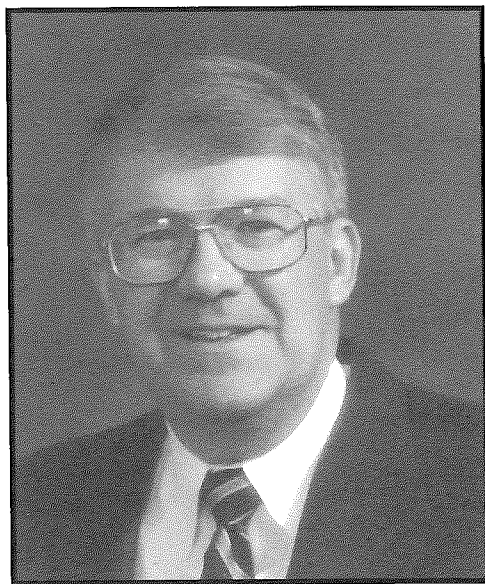
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## New Statue of Francis Asbury Asbury Park, Wilmore, Kentucky



Bronze Sculpture by Everette Wyatt. Dedicated on Thursday, June 17, 1993.  
Photo by Fred C. Cramer, Advancement Production Manager,  
Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.





Rev. Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.

The Reverend Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., is General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church; Adjunct Professor of American Church History, The Theological and Graduate Schools, Drew University; Adjunct Professor of Church History, Moravian Theological Seminary (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania); and Editor, *Methodist History*. He is married to Jean Brittingham Yrigoyen, who is an Assistant in the Methodist Archives and History Center, Madison, New Jersey. The Yrigoyens have two children, Debra Jean Floriani and Charles Yrigoyen III, and two grandchildren.

Dr. Yrigoyen studied at the University of Pennsylvania (B.S. in Economics); Lancaster Theological Seminary (B.D.); Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (Th.M.); and Temple University (Ph.D.). He has done post-doctoral work at Union Theological Seminary (New York City). In 1987 Albright College awarded him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

The Reverend Dr. Yrigoyen served as Pastor of Falls Methodist Church (Philadelphia), Lancaster Avenue Methodist Church (Lancaster), and Gap Methodist Church (Gap, Pennsylvania). He has been a Campus Minister for The United Methodist Church in Philadelphia and Professor of Religion and Chaplain at Albright College. He is a member of the World Methodist Historical Society; the World Methodist Council; the Archives Advisory Committee of the National Council of Churches; and the Board of Trustees, Ocean City Tabernacle Association, Ocean City, New Jersey. He is a member of the American Society of Church History, The Charles Wesley Society, the Wesley Historical Society, and the Wesleyan Theological Society. Dr. Yrigoyen is the author of *Acts for Our Time: A Study of the Acts of the Apostles* and *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*. He is co-author of *United Methodism in America: A Compact History*. In addition, he has written numerous articles and reviews.

The Reverend Dr. Yrigoyen is an ordained minister of The United Methodist Church and a member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. He has been a delegate to the General Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference since 1980.

## The Continuing Influence of Francis Asbury

*Presentation made at "An Asbury Celebration,"  
First United Methodist Church, Trenton, New Jersey, Saturday, October 26, 1996,  
under the combined sponsorship of the Conference Historical Society  
and the Commission on Archives and History, Southern New Jersey Conference.*

Rev. Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.

During the last two years of his life, Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, continued his itinerant ministry. His aging body was weakened by rheumatism, pleurisy, and asthma, but he refused to discontinue his traveling. "It has never been my practice," he declared, "to say to the younger preachers, 'Go, boys,' but 'Come.' I have ever set an example of industry and punctuality, and if ever the young men should neglect their appointments it must not be by our example."

On March 24, 1816, John Wesley Bond (1784-1819), a traveling companion, gently lifted the ailing Asbury into his arms and carried him into a church in Richmond, Virginia, where he was to preach his last sermon. Asbury delivered his message sitting on a table and frequently paused for breath. The sermon lasted an hour. A week later he died in the cabin of George Arnold in Spottsylvania County, Virginia.

Who was this man who was known endearingly as "our father" by many of the early Methodist preachers, and who was later judged to be the "Master Craftsman of American Methodism" (Frank Baker) and the "Prophet of the Long Road"?<sup>1</sup> Henry Boehm, another of Asbury's traveling companions, left a verbal portrait of his physical features:

Bishop Asbury was five feet nine inches high, weighed one hundred and fifty-one pounds, erect in person, and of a very commanding appearance. His features were rugged, but his countenance was intelligent, though time and care had furrowed it deep with wrinkles. His nose was prominent, his mouth large, as if made on purpose to talk, and his eyes of a blueish cast, and so keen that it seemed as if he could look right through a person. He had a fine forehead, indicative of no ordinary brain, and beautiful white locks, which hung about his brow and shoulders, and added to his venerable appearance. There was as much native dignity about him as any man I ever knew. He seemed born to sway others. There was an austerity about his looks that was forbidding to those who were unacquainted with him.

In dress he was a pattern of neatness and plainness. He could have passed for a quaker had it not been for the color of his garments, which were black when I traveled with him. He formerly wore gray clothes. He wore a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, a frock coat, which was generally buttoned up to the neck, with straight collar. He wore breeches or small clothes, with leggings. Sometimes he

<sup>1</sup>Ezra Squier Tipple (1861-1936), *Francis Asbury: The Prophet of the Long Road* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1923).

wore shoe-buckles. Indeed all the preachers, and I among the number, wore breeches and leggings till 1810, and then several left them off, which Bishop Asbury heartily disapproved.<sup>2</sup>

While his physical appearance is interesting, we are concerned with deeper questions. Our task today is to consider his contributions to American Methodism and to ask about his lingering influence on our church. We will very briefly consider five areas.

1. Asbury was one of the most important historians of early American Methodism. Although there is a considerable body of documents which describe the origins and development of Methodism in the colonial and early national periods of our history, none is more important than Asbury's Journal and Letters. They recount the story of Methodism's early leaders, its spread across the nation, the critical issues with which it dealt, and the ways in which it attempted to fulfill its mission statement, "To reform the Continent, and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands."<sup>3</sup> Asbury's writings continue to be a major source of information about our history.

2. No one did more to advocate and implement the principle of an itinerant ministry in American Methodism than Francis Asbury. From the time he landed in America, October 27, 1771, he was devoted to the Wesleyan idea of a traveling ministry. Methodist preachers needed to be where people were settling. Expressing his concern that some of the early preachers preferred to settle into city pastorates, he wrote, "My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way."<sup>4</sup> And he did! He rode about 250,000 miles, crossed the Allegheny Mountains sixty times; visited countless homes, chapels, campmeetings, and churches; preached; counseled; and organized groups of Methodists. Since he was convinced that the Methodist message of salvation available to all was urgent, he believed that every Methodist preacher must travel to any place where people could be addressed. Someone has said that nothing bothered Asbury more than a preacher not always in motion. Though the itinerant system has been modified since Asbury's day and is under stress in our time, there is little doubt that he was its chief American architect and that his influence is still felt in its basic principle.

3. Allied to the itinerant system is the role of the episcopacy in American Methodism. Bishops supervise the itinerant system and are subject themselves to

<sup>2</sup>Henry Boehm (1775-1875), *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; Being Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Rev. Henry Boehm* ([Edited by] J. B. Wakeley; New York: Nelson & Phillips [Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden], 1875; first published 1865; reprint, Lancaster, PA., 1982), pp. 438-439.

<sup>3</sup>*Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., The Rev. Francis Asbury, and Others, at a Conference, Begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th. of December, in the Year 1784: Composing a Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers and Other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Philadelphia: Printed by Charles Cist, 1785), Question 4, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Asbury, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 10; Thu., Nov. 21, 1771; New York.

the itinerancy. No one did more to shape the office of bishop in our church than Francis Asbury. In 1784 John Wesley appointed Thomas Coke and Asbury "superintendents," a title which they used until 1788, when the term was changed to "bishop." Asbury would not accept the appointment unless the American preachers elected him to the office, thus beginning the practice of electing our episcopal leaders. Changing the name of the office from Superintendent to Bishop infuriated Wesley, who wrote to Asbury: "How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called Bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool, . . . and I am content; but they shall never by my consent call me Bishop!"<sup>5</sup> Episcopal authority developed under Asbury's influence and was cultivated in several crises in the young church. Perhaps the most notable of these was James O'Kelly's attempt to challenge the Bishop's authority to appoint preachers to their stations at the 1792 General Conference.<sup>6</sup> O'Kelly believed preachers should have the right to appeal an unwise or inconvenient appointment to their peers, and if the appeal were upheld, be entitled to a new appointment. When the General Conference rejected his position, O'Kelly walked out and formed a new church. But Asbury's and his successors' authority was secured and lasts into our day.

4. Like John Wesley, Francis Asbury had strong opinions about the relation of the gospel to social issues. For example, he spoke about the evil of slavery and racism. In 1779 he wrote:

I have lately been impressed with a deep concern for bringing about the freedom of slaves in America, and feel resolved to do what I can to promote it. If God in His providence hath detained me in this country to be instrumental in so merciful and great an undertaking, I hope He will give me wisdom and courage sufficient, and enable me to give Him all the glory. I am strongly persuaded that if Methodists will not yield on this point and emancipate their slaves, God will depart from them. . . . I have just finished my feeble performance against slavery; if our conference should come into the measure, I trust it will be one of the means toward generally expelling the practice from our Society. How would my heart rejoice if my detention in these parts should afford me leisure in a measure in so desirable a work. . . . I was employed according [to] the desire of the conference in preparing a circular letter, to promote the emancipation of slaves, and to be read in our Societies.<sup>7</sup>

We continue the practice of Wesley, Asbury, and others in speaking clearly and forcefully on matters of social evil.

<sup>5</sup>John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford* (Edited by John Telford; Standard Edition; Vol. VIII: July 24, 1787, to February 24, 1791; London: The Epworth Press, J. Alfred Sharp, 1931), Letter to Francis Asbury, London, September 20, 1788; p. 91.

<sup>6</sup>James O'Kelly (1757-1826), born in Ireland, emigrated to America in 1778 and that same year was admitted to the traveling connection. He was ordained elder at the Christmas Conference (Baltimore, 1784), and he served for several years as presiding elder. After opposing the authority of the bishop in 1792, he withdrew and formed the Republican Methodist Church.

<sup>7</sup>Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury*, pp.121-122.

5. We are beginning to appreciate in new ways Asbury's emphasis on the importance of discipline in the Christian life. Asbury was no practitioner of "casual Christianity." Even before he was dispatched to America he wrote to his parents, "... I know what I am called to. It is to give up all, and to have my hand and heart in the work [of living to God] . . . ."<sup>8</sup> Upon leaving his home for America he entered these words in his Journal:

Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honour? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No: I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do. . . . The people God owns in England, are the Methodists. The doctrines they preach, and the discipline they enforce, are, I believe, the purest of any people now in the world. . . . If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England.<sup>9</sup>

In his wisdom, Asbury realized that the holy life to which he was devoted could not be lived without discipline. Therefore, he employed the means of grace given by God to bring faith to maturity. As Frank Baker reminds us, "... he regularly rose at 4:00 A.M., spent long hours in prayer and Bible study, lived frugally, fasted every Friday, missed meals to keep appointments, and always counted people as more important than his own pleasure or pain." He strove to be the "altogether Christian." His life and ministry remain an inspiration to those familiar with his story.

More is presented about Francis Asbury in this issue of *The Historical Trail*. He was a person of sure faith and strong conviction who was thoroughly devoted to the Methodist message of God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Probably no American Methodist is better known. And probably no American Methodist had more influence on the life of the church then and now!

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<sup>8</sup>Asbury, Letters, Vol. III, p. 4; Letter to his Parents; Wiltshire, England, October 26, 1768.

<sup>9</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 4–5; Thu., Sept. 12, 1771; on board ship from the Port of Pill (near Bristol), England, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

### John Wesley Bond

(1784–1819)

John Wesley Bond,—born in Baltimore, state of Maryland, December 11, 1784. His father, Mr. Thomas Bond, was among the first fruits of Methodism in Maryland, having been brought to the knowledge of the truth, together with his first wife, through the instrumentality of the Rev. Mr. Strawbridge. Nothing very remarkable occurred in the life of John until the time of his conversion to God in 1800. His conviction of sin was deep, and the witness of justification and acceptance with God clear.

After various and repeated exercises of mind, relative to his call to the work of the ministry, he was received on trial in the Baltimore Conference in 1810, and appointed to Calvert circuit with brother Alfred Griffith.

In 1811 he was appointed to Fairfax; and in 1812 to Great Falls circuit. In 1813, in consequence of peculiar family circumstances, he received a location. His circumstances becoming more favourable, he offered himself again to the Conference in 1814, and was appointed to travel with Bishop Asbury, and continued with him as his constant attendant until the close of his life. The many infirmities of the aged bishop imposed a laborious and important duty upon brother Bond, which he discharged with firmness, fidelity, and perseverance.

In 1816 he was appointed to Severn circuit; and in 1817 and 1818 to Harford. In this circuit his labours were greatly blessed.

After the disorder of which he died (the prevailing epidemic fever) had been fixed for several days, he left his circuit, and retired to Baltimore for the purpose of obtaining medical aid. His brother, a physician in the city, alarmed at the apparent danger of his situation, called to his assistance several of the most eminent physicians of the city, who kindly afforded him their aid. But alas! all human efforts were now unavailing; the die was cast; and after a painful struggle of ten days from the time he arrived in town, he died, on the 22d of January, 1819.

For a few days in the beginning of the fatal disorder which terminated his mortal life he was subject to great affliction and distress of mind; but the conflict soon closed in peace and triumph, which continued, without interruption, till his happy spirit entered into the perfect joy of his Lord.

Our beloved brother Bond possessed a clear understanding and a sound judgment. His knowledge in divinity was far from being superficial. He was fond of reading, patient and persevering in investigation, and diligent in all the duties of his Christian and ministerial profession. But he rests from his labours, and his works follow him.\*

\*See Revelation 14:13.

*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773–1828; Volume I (New-York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840; Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the Year 1819; pp. 324–325.*



Rev. Helen L. Rainier

The Reverend Helen L. Rainier is Pastor of the Church of the Master (United Methodist) in Howell, New Jersey. She is an ordained minister of The United Methodist Church and a member of the Southern New Jersey Conference.

The Reverend Helen Rainier is a graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

Previous appointments include Newcombtown United Methodist Church, Millville; Buckshutem United Methodist Church; Saint John's United Methodist Church, Harrisonville; and Ferrell United Methodist Church.

Service in the annual conference has included the Committee on the Status and Role of Women, Southwest District Committee on District Superintendency, the Board of Ordained Ministry, Doorkeeper for the Committee on Conference Sessions, Northeast District Board of Church Location and Building, Board of Discipleship, Educational Society, and the Council on Ministries.

In 1996 the Reverend Helen Rainier was a delegate to the General Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

The Reverend Helen Rainier is enrolled in the doctoral program in Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

## Asbury's Use of the Laity

*Presentation made at "An Asbury Celebration,"  
First United Methodist Church, Trenton, New Jersey, Saturday, October 26, 1996,  
under the combined sponsorship of the Conference Historical Society  
and the Commission on Archives and History, Southern New Jersey Conference.*

Rev. Helen L. Rainier

### Introduction

In order to study how early Methodism was established and grew, one must venture first to look at who planted and established Methodism in America. There is no doubt in my mind that Methodism began and grew because of the planting of lay men and lay women. Such names as Robert Strawbridge (? -1781), Barbara Ruckle Heck (1734-1804), Philip Embury (1728-1773), Richard Allen (1760-1831), Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827), and Captain Thomas Webb (1725 [or 1724]-1796), to name only a few early Methodist laity, lay preachers, and class leaders who shared the Gospel of Christ from their hearts, studied the Bible with other laity, and continued to grow in faith and number, formed early Methodist societies, establishing the first churches and firmly bringing Christ to many families' daily lives.

Francis Asbury, American Methodism's first bishop and great itinerant preacher, worked with and was supported by and affirmed these early lay men and lay women who planted and established American Methodism in the 1700s. By the time Francis Asbury arrived in America, Irish-born lay women and lay men had already begun the great work of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land.

### Robert Strawbridge

In Maryland, the key layman was Robert Strawbridge, a farmer, who began his work as early as June of 1766. (Sam's Creek, near New Windsor, was where Strawbridge began forming the first Methodist class.) Strawbridge was a strong-willed Irishman, a maverick, who administered the sacraments because he saw a need. Both Francis Asbury and Thomas Rankin (1738-1810) found him very difficult to handle, and Asbury allowed Strawbridge in 1773 to be an exception to the rule "to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labour in America is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper." (*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773-1828*; Volume I [New-York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840]; *Minutes of Some Conversations Between the Preachers in Connection with The Rev. Mr. John Wesley*; Philadelphia, June, 1773; p. 5.)



Upon Strawbridge's death in 1781, Asbury commented that this might be God's judgment, so that Strawbridge would do no hurt to God's cause.<sup>2</sup>

### Barbara Heck

In New York it was an Irish woman, Barbara Heck, who encouraged her Irish cousin Philip Embury, a carpenter, to begin preaching there. Later this group formed, from a small group of family roots, the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church.

Other laity who helped Asbury and worked spreading Methodism in America were William Watters (1751–1827), Freeborn Garrettson, Captain Thomas Webb, and Thomas Taylor. All the early beginnings in Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York were led by laity. The laity operated under the designation of "local preacher" or "class leader." When Asbury journeyed through their area these laity took him in and encouraged him to preach, and they supported Asbury on his way. These same laity were left behind to do the weekly and daily church leading. These lay people were the dynamic and inspiring force behind the early growth of Methodism in America.

### Wesley Sends Missionaries

Thomas Taylor wrote to John Wesley in England, and it was after this letter that Wesley sent his missionaries to America: Richard Boardman (1738–1782) and Joseph Pilmore (*or* Pilmoor) (1739–1825) in 1769, but only Francis Asbury, the Father of American Methodism, as he is often referred to, had the courage to stay. Asbury worked with these earlier laity, helping to organize and discipline their plantings into beginning congregations. According to journals and letters discovered of these early years, it seems that tension did develop between Wesley's English missionaries and the new native preachers of America. William Watters of Maryland is an example of one who was influenced by Strawbridge; there was some trouble also with Philip Gatch (1751–1835) of Maryland, and Freeborn Garrettson. Francis Asbury, the only remaining English missionary, weathered the storm of the American Revolution and became respected by all these lay preachers and class leaders enough to be welcomed and made the first bishop of American Methodism.

### Francis Asbury

Asbury worked with many laity. Thanks to Judge Thomas White (1730–1795), Asbury had a place to hole up during the Revolutionary War. Asbury trusted these laity with the day-to-day work of American Methodism. As

<sup>2</sup>"He is now no more: upon the whole, I am inclined to think the Lord took him away in judgment, because he was in a way to do hurt to his cause; and that he saved him in mercy, because from his death-bed conversation he appears to have had hope in his end." (Asbury, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 411; Mon., Sept. 3, 1781.)

the weeks, months, and days went by, continual tensions mounted between issues of authority and freedom, centralization and democracy of leadership. Asbury worked through it all with the laity. Asbury was able to see both a holy people and a great church for God.

### Captain Thomas Webb

Great lay leaders such as Captain Thomas Webb, a former British officer, author, and a great lay preacher, helped form and build the people of New Jersey Methodism. John Adams once stated that he heard Captain Webb preach at Old Saint George's Church in Philadelphia: "He is one of the most fluent, eloquent Men I ever heard."<sup>3</sup> Captain Thomas Webb is considered the founding father of Methodism in New Jersey, with several churches in Trenton, Burlington, and Pemberton. Captain Webb's work ended with the American Revolutionary War. Webb had to stop when he was arrested in Burlington and moved to Pennsylvania and then sent back by ship to England. Captain Thomas Webb was a most impressive man, with a red coat, a green eye patch, and a large sword that he laid across the Bible while he preached.

### New Jersey Laity

Other laity who worked with Francis Asbury, and in a sense before and after Asbury's visits, were Joseph Toy (1748–1826) of Trenton; John Early of Greenwich Township and Gloucester County; Squire Thomas Murphy of Saint John's in Hazlet; William Budd of Pemberton; Benjamin Abbott (1732–1796) of Friendship Church; Tunis Melick of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties; Colonel William McCullough of Asbury, New Jersey; Joseph Swayze of Hope, New Jersey; Sampson Howell, also of Hope, New Jersey; Nicholas Abertson; Jesse Lee (1758–1816); Phillips Cummings and Mary Cramer, a married couple of Vienna Methodist Church; and James Egbert. All these lay Methodists laid the foundation. Captain Thomas Webb cemented the work together, and Wesley's missionaries such as Francis Asbury brought disciplined unity to it.

I truly believe that without the support of all these named lay women and men and all the other unnamed laity, Methodism in America would never have prospered and grown as it did. Francis Asbury understood this fact and helped to continue this strong pattern of lay leadership, family involvement, and small sharing groups which built the foundation of The United Methodist Church today. May we never forget this truth.

<sup>3</sup>John Adams (1735–1826), *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Lyman Henry Butterfield, editor (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), Volume 2 (Diary 1771–1781); Sunday, October 23, 1774; p. 156. Adams was the second President of the United States (1797–1801).

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**Jesse Lee**  
 (1758-1816)

Jesse Lee,—who was born in Prince George's county, state of Virginia, in the year of our Lord 1758, of respectable parents; and after a painful conviction for sin, under which he laboured for some considerable time, he was happily brought to a saving acquaintance with God about the fifteenth year of his age. He was mercifully preserved while in the slippery paths of youth, and conducted by the Spirit and grace of God to that wisdom and experience which prepared him for usefulness in the church of Christ. He entered the travelling connection, and in 1783 laboured on Caswell circuit; 1784, Salisbury; 1785, Caroline; 1786, Kent; 1787, Baltimore; 1788, Flanders; 1789, Stanford; 1790, 1791, 1792, elder in Connecticut; 1793, province of Maine and Lynn; 1794, 1795, 1796, presiding elder in New-England; 1797, 1798, 1799, travelled with Bishop Asbury; 1800, New-York; 1801, 1802, 1803, Norfolk district; 1804, Petersburg; 1805, Mecklenburg; 1806, Amelia; 1807, Sparta; 1808, Cumberland; 1809, Brunswick; 1810, Meherrin district; 1811, Amelia; 1812, Richmond; 1813, Brunswick; 1814, Cumberland and Manchester; 1815, Fredericksburg; 1816, Annapolis; in which year he finished his course.

It is unnecessary to eulogize one whose labours have extended almost from one end of the United States to the other. To numbers he is well known in the vineyard of the Lord. Brother Henry Boehm, who was present with him during his last illness, writes thus:—

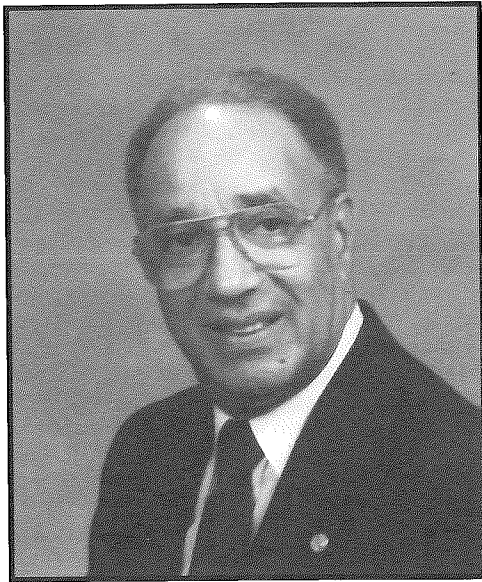
"He came over to our camp meeting near Hillsboro', (on the Eastern Shore of Maryland,) which began the 21st of August. Thursday the 22d he preached a profitable sermon from 1 Peter ii, 5, 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house,' &c. Saturday, 24th, at three o'clock, he preached on 2 Peter iii, 18, 'But grow in grace,' which was his last text, and ended his public labours. A large, attentive, serious, and much affected congregation will not soon forget the sermon and feelings on that memorable occasion. The same evening he was taken with a chill that was succeeded by a fever, which continued to the close of his life. On Sunday morning, 25th, he was removed to Hillsboro', to the house of brother Sellers, where every attention by physicians and friends was given, but all proved ineffectual. Through the first part of his illness his mind was much weighed down, so that he spake but little. On Tuesday night, September 10th, he broke out in ecstasies of joy. Also on Wednesday, 11th, about nine o'clock, A. M., he delivered himself in words like these: 'Glory! glory! glory! Hallelujah! Jesus reigns.' On the same evening he spoke nearly twenty minutes, deliberately and distinctly; among other things, he directed me to write to his brother Ned, and let him know he died happy in the Lord; and was fully satisfied with brother Sellers' conduct toward him.

"Give my respects to Bishop M'Kendree, (said he,) and tell him that I die in love with all the preachers; that I love him, and that he lives in my heart.' Then he took his leave of all present, six or seven in number, and requested us to pray. This solemn night will never be forgotten by me. After this he spake but little. Thursday, the 12th, in the early part of the day, he lost his speech, but appeared to retain his reason. Thus he continued to linger till the same evening, about half past seven o'clock, when, without a sigh or groan, he expired, with his eyes seemingly fixed on the prize."

Such was the end of brother Jesse Lee. Our deceased brother was a sound, orthodox, Methodist preacher; and allowing for the infirmities of human nature, one who sincerely endeavoured to promote the glory of God and the happiness of mankind.

We have no doubt he has entered into rest—that he now partakes of that happiness to which he endeavoured to lead others: and if we are faithful we may expect to hail him on that eternal shore, "where all is calm, and joy, and peace." Amen.

*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773-1828; Volume I (New-York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840); Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the Year 1817; pp. 292-293.*



Rev. Edwin L. Ellis

The Reverend Edwin L. Ellis is a graduate of Lincoln University of Pennsylvania and Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. He has served appointments in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. He was District Superintendent twice: West Chester District of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, and Dover District of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference. He has served as a Trustee for Methodist Hospital, Philadelphia, for eleven years. His career has focused upon educational ministries, and he has served as workshop leader in evangelism, stewardship, and church administration and organization for local churches of our annual conference. He has also served as study group leader for several Southern New Jersey Festivals of Learning. Recently, he chaired the Ethnic Local Church Commission of this Conference for two quadrennia. He retired in 1988 and went to Good Shepherd United Methodist Church in Willingboro, where he faithfully served eight years as pastor in retirement. In June 1996 he left the active pastorate and now resides in Williamstown, New Jersey.

## What Would Asbury Do Today, and What Would the Result Be?

*Presentation made at "An Asbury Celebration,"  
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and the Commission on Archives and History, Southern New Jersey Conference.*

Rev. Edwin L. Ellis

The question upon which I focus is the church today as it compares with how it is perceived during the days and ministry of Francis Asbury. If Asbury were to re-visit now, how would he possibly feel about the church and Methodist Christians in the world today?

Francis Asbury embodied what was at that time the heart of John Wesley's Methodism—an evangelizing spirit. He followed early pioneers to the West, and along with other traveling preachers preached to worshipers along the trails. When a customary route was established, it became known as a "circuit," and the preachers were known as "circuit riders." Asbury rode more than a quarter of a million miles on the circuits.

### Characteristics of Early Methodism

The factors that characterized Asbury and the early Methodist movement are the following:

1. There was a strong focus on evangelism, to reach out and challenge those who followed and listened.
2. Preachers traveled to where the people settled.
3. Worship services were geared to the language of the people.
4. The preachers generally had no special training, and wherever they went the Word of God was emphasized.
5. Early organization and structure were simple and spontaneous.
6. Asbury helped organize the first conference in Baltimore, December 24, 1784–January 2, 1785. There were sixty preachers present.
7. Asbury was ordained Deacon and Elder at this conference and appointed Superintendent during the same week.
8. Early Methodism had few formal meeting houses, and most services were in the out-of-doors.
9. The followers were made up of all types of people—all classes, men and women, and at times black and white.

### Questions for Methodists Today

As we look at the Methodists today, and reflect back to the days of Francis Asbury, I raise several questions about our mission and purpose:

1. Do we reach out and continue to evangelize with the same spiritual fervor?
2. Are we organizing new congregations as the need arises, because of population growth or shifts, or because we are raising new converts?
3. Are we on the right track in developing larger and regional congregations instead of promoting smaller community fellowships—perhaps on the “circuit” as in Asbury’s time?
4. Is our organization and structure so complicated that loyalty leaves less time for spiritual growth and revival?
5. Does having higher educational standards for church leaders (pastors and others) challenge career over calling?
6. Do our sophisticated buildings, programs, and budgets suggest that more vital ministry has lesser priority today than in Asbury’s day?

### What Asbury Would Find Today

As we reflect upon the status, mission, and ministry of today’s church, Asbury might be pleased with many things he would find:

1. Our thrust for spiritual formation and renewal.
2. Our growing effort to be more all-inclusive with participation equally by clergy, laity; women, men; youth, adults; all races and classes.
3. Our efforts to be partners in ministry with both laity and clergy. Asbury might frown a bit to see lay people leading the church in many areas—with clergy and laity respecting each other’s roles and responsibilities.
4. Our efforts today in setting priorities and goals for mission and evangelism (and other program areas).
5. Our efforts to establish new congregations where needed—with most conferences having a master plan for church growth.
6. Seemingly, fervent effort to address key society issues on local and national levels—some of which are AIDS, crime, aging, and others.
7. Efforts to embody all Wesleyan Christians in common ministry by reorganization, mergers, and dialogue. One example is the Pan-Methodist movement involving United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches and others in continuous dialogue through various leadership committees, workshops, and worship experiences.

Today, I feel certain that Francis Asbury would join to support the church and promote its causes in the world and throughout Christendom.

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### Freeborn Garrettson

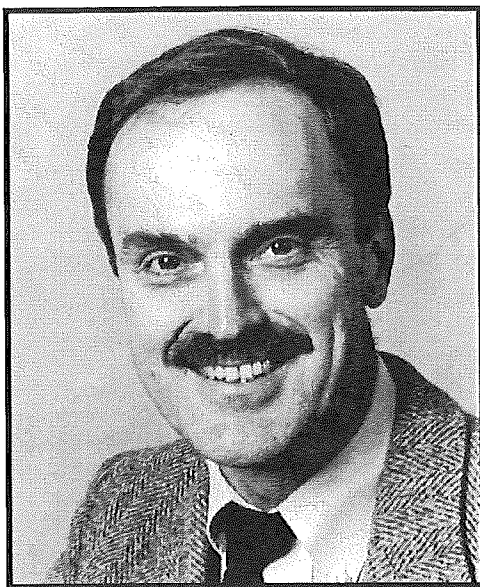
(1752–1827)

FREEBORN GARRETTSON. He was born in the state of Maryland, in the year 1752. In the twenty-third year of his age, in 1775, he was made a partaker of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In the same year, 1775, he joined the Conference of itinerant Methodist ministers. From the time of his entrance on this work until the year 1784 he travelled extensively through the states of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New-Jersey; and in all these places he preached the word with distinguished success. In 1784 he volunteered as a missionary for Nova Scotia, where he continued about three years, and laboured with great assiduity and success, leaving about six hundred members in society as the fruit of his ministry. In 1788, assisted by twelve young preachers, he commenced his gospel labours in the state of New-York, in the western part of Connecticut, and in Vermont. Here also the Lord of the harvest gave him seals to his ministry. In 1791 he was married to Miss Catharine Livingston, of Rhinebeck, who was every way qualified to be a help-meet indeed. The remainder of his active and useful life Mr. Garrettson spent principally within the bounds of the New-York Conference, filling some of the most important stations with equal credit to himself and usefulness to the church. In the year 1818, in consequence of age and its attendant infirmities, he was permitted to labour as his strength would admit, and was everywhere received with the affection and veneration due to his character as a father in the gospel. In his last sickness he suffered much, but bore his sufferings with Christian patience and resignation. The last sentence he was heard to utter on the night preceding his death was, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Hallelujah! hallelujah!” Thus ended the days of this holy man of God and successful minister of the Lord Jesus, in the seventy-sixth year of his age and the fifty-second of his itinerant ministry, at the house of his intimate friend, George Suckley, Esq., in New-York, September 26, 1827.

For a more particular account of our deceased friend and father in the gospel, see *Methodist Magazine* for March, 1828, and his *Life*, shortly to be published. He was a man of good judgment, great simplicity and sincerity, deeply experienced in the things of God, and a strenuous advocate for the cardinal truths of the gospel.

As an evidence of his strong attachment to the cause of his Redeemer, he made provision for the annual support of a single preacher as a missionary, to be appointed by the New-York Conference.

*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773–1828; Volume I* (New-York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840); *Minutes of Conferences for 1828*; p. 574.



Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe

The Reverend Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe is Professor of Church History, Drew University; and Librarian, Methodist Archives and History Center, Madison, New Jersey. Dr. Rowe received the A.B. degree from Drew University; the B.D. from Yale University Divinity School; the Ph.D. from Drew University; and the M.L.S. from Rutgers, The State University. His Ph.D. dissertation was *Nestor of Orthodoxy, New England Style: A Study in the Theology of Edwards Amasa Park*. In 1990 Dr. Rowe received both the Professor of the Year Award and the Presidential Citation as Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award at Drew University. The Reverend Dr. Rowe served as Campus Minister and as Pastor of Gethsemane Methodist Church in Philadelphia before his appointment to Drew University.

Dr. Rowe is a member of the American Academy of Religion, American Society of Church History, American Theological Library Association, The Charles Wesley Society, General Commission on Archives and History, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Editorial Board of *Methodist History*, Methodist Librarians' Fellowship, North American Academy of Liturgy, Order of Saint Luke, Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, United Methodist Historical Society, Wesley Historical Society (London), and World Methodist Historical Society.

Dr. Rowe's books include *Calvin Bibliography*; *Luther: A Theological Bibliography*; *Services and Resources for Worship on Historic Occasions*; *Methodist Union Catalog: Pre-1976 Imprints*; *Methodist Women: A Guide to the Literature*; *United Methodist Studies: Basic Bibliographies*; *Black Methodists: A Guide to the Literature*; and *A Heritage in Hymns: 200 Years of Worship Through Music*. He is also the editor of several books and series and is the author of many articles.

The Reverend Dr. Rowe is an ordained minister of The United Methodist Church and a member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. He is a member of the Southern New Jersey Conference Historical Society.

## Was Asbury Doing What Wesley Wanted, or What Asbury Wanted?

*An Essay Celebrating the 225th Anniversary of the Arrival of Francis Asbury  
in North America*

*First United Methodist Church, Trenton, New Jersey, October 26, 1996*

Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe

In 1769 John Wesley finally answered the repeated American pleas for assistance by sending Joseph Pilmore (or Pilmoor) (1739–1825) and Richard Boardman (1738–1782), together with £50, to help consolidate the Methodist work. Between that year and 1774 four pairs of itinerant missionaries traveled to America. Among these Francis Asbury, who arrived in 1771 with Richard Wright (17?– ?), was by far the most important in providing leadership to the American movement. He had been born in Birmingham in 1745, the son of a small farmer, and had received only a rudimentary education. Convinced of the need for repentance and rebirth after reading sermons by, among others, George Whitefield (1714–1770), he began preaching locally in 1762 while an apprentice in an ironworks. Wesley appointed him to his first circuit as a probationer four years later. Asbury eventually itinerated on five different circuits before volunteering for service in North America at the age of twenty-six.

Despite being only an adequate speaker and plagued by chronic poor health, Asbury quickly emerged as the dominant personality in American Methodism. He strongly disapproved of the settled ministry favored by Pilmore and Boardman, and through his tremendous energy and determination and his indomitable spirit, he forced the other ministers to follow his itinerating style. Throughout his long career, Asbury never had a permanent home. He traveled constantly from New England to Georgia, followed the new settlers across the Appalachian Mountains into the western territories, and even visited what is now Canada. He died in Richmond, Virginia, on his way to the 1816 General Conference at Baltimore. By his example and through direct supervision, he established a model ministry that greatly facilitated missionary expansion into new regions. At the same time, he oversaw the creation of a strong connectional organization based on his understanding of Wesley's "rules" and intentions, but adapted to suit the different circumstances in America.

In the following anecdote, taken from a letter written by Wesley and later published by William Hammett (?–1803) in 1789, we find a classic expression of the war of wills waged between these two giants of Methodism, Francis Asbury and John Wesley.

I was therefore a little surprised when I received some letters from Mr. Asbury affirming that no person in Europe knew how to direct those in America. Soon after, he flatly refused to receive Mr. Whatcoat in the character I sent him. He told

George Shadford, "Mr. Wesley and I are like Caesar, and Pompey;—he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior." And accordingly he quietly sat by till his friends, by common consent, voted my name out of the American minutes. This completed the matter and shewed that he had no connection with me.<sup>1</sup>

Under Asbury's leadership the Methodist movement was becoming "Americanized" as it developed its own native-born ministry and increasingly identified itself with the aspirations of the emerging nation. American Methodists and their charismatic leader would no longer submit meekly to British control, nor would they continue their links to the discredited Church of England in America. With these developments in mind this article explores several of Asbury's "adaptations" of Wesley's plan from the very beginning of his ministry in Britain's North American colonies.

1. *Asbury assumed the role of chief assistant without Wesley's consent, 1779.*

Though Thomas Rankin (1738–1810), Wesley's chief assistant in the British colonies in North America, was back in England early in 1778 and doubtless reported to Wesley the state of affairs among the Methodists there, Wesley took no action to provide leadership for the beleaguered Americans. When the preachers from the circuits north of the Potomac met in conference with Asbury at Judge Thomas White's (1730–1795) in Delaware in April 1779, they authorized him to act as General Assistant.<sup>2</sup> Asbury accepted the new leadership role and made no effort to get Wesley's blessing. Not until 1783, four years later, did Wesley formally authorize Asbury's leadership role in North America.

2. *Asbury refuses Wesley's appointment and seeks "election" as "bishop" in the new church.*

With minimal consultation, in the autumn of 1784 John Wesley took the dramatic step of ordaining Thomas Coke as "general superintendent" of the American church, with power to consecrate Francis Asbury as co-general superintendent, thus setting in motion the sought-for separation from the Church of England. Asbury insisted that Wesley's plan be discussed by the preachers at a general conference in Baltimore and implemented only after an affirmative vote.

<sup>1</sup>William Hammett (?–1803), *A Rejoindre, Being A Defence of the Truth contained in An Appeal to Truth and Circumstances; In Seven Letters to the Rev. Mr. Morrell*. Charleston, S.C.: I. Silliman, 1792, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America, From 1773 to 1794, inclusive* (Philadelphia: Printed by Henry Tuckniss, and Sold by John Dickins, 1795). "Minutes of Some Conversations Between the Preachers in Connection with The Rev. Mr. John Wesley, Kent County, Delaware, April 28th, 1779," Question 12, p. 29:

Quest. 12. Ought not brother Asbury to act as General Assistant in America?

Ans. He ought: 1st, on account of his age; 2d, because originally appointed by Mr. Wesley; 3d, being joined with Messrs. Rankin and Shadford, by express order from Mr. Wesley.

The preachers approved the plan and elected Asbury to the episcopal office. Both Coke's and Wesley's power to lead suffered.

3. *Asbury beat off Wesley's attempt to meddle in American Methodist affairs, 1787.*

Asbury's co-bishop, Thomas Coke, was never able or willing to supply more than token supervision for the Methodists in America. Although he and Asbury respected each other, they disagreed on the best strategy for expansion, and Asbury was not prepared to relinquish his control to a visiting Englishman. Coke's major interest was overseas missions, particularly to non-Christian lands, and he supervised that work until his death in 1814. With these developments in mind and without consulting the Americans, Wesley decided Asbury needed help. He directed Coke to return to America, convene a general conference, and elect Richard Whatcoat (1736–1806) bishop. Asbury and the American preachers agreed to convene a general conference, but refused to elect Whatcoat or anyone else bishop, revoked the "submission" rule of the Christmas Conference,<sup>3</sup> removed Wesley from the list of bishops, and retitled the book of discipline to eliminate words "connecting" them to him.

4. *Asbury develops a doctrine of episcopal primacy that goes beyond Wesley and veers toward Rome.*

In his unfinished address to the General Conference of 1816 the ailing bishop counsels "my loving confidential Sons in the Gospel" to "stand fast in the Gospel doctrine and pure Apostolic ordination, discipline and government into which we have been called and now stand."

We are prepared, and, if called upon, to prove . . . , not from uncertain Church Histories and testimonies [*i.e.*, Wesley's revered tradition], but from the pure Oracles of the New Testament [*i.e.*, *sola Scriptura*],—Three distinct ordinations, their distinct powers rising in gospel order by constituted degrees, one over another, and under the government, and distinct in names, that is to say Apostles, Elders, and Deacons. We will enter the sanctuary of divine truth, here we shall stand, this is our ground.<sup>4</sup>

Fifteen years earlier, Asbury had written in his Journal (Sunday, April 5, 1801), "There is not—nor indeed, in my mind, can there be—a perfect equality between a constant president, and those over whom he always presides."<sup>5</sup> This is imperial episcopacy with a vengeance! Wesley never made such claims to episcopal primacy. For him bishops and presbyters (priests or elders) were of the same order; only their office (their role) differs. If Wesley had made such a claim, he would

<sup>3</sup>During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the Gospel, ready in matters belonging to church government, to obey his commands." (Answer to Question 2 [*The General Minutes of the Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Forming the Constitution of Said Church (Discipline, second edition; London: 1786)*], p. 322.)

<sup>4</sup>Asbury, Letters, Vol. III, pp. 531–542, especially p. 532; Address to Conference of 1816.

<sup>5</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. II, p. 290.



never have undertaken to ordain a bishop and preachers for the Methodists in North America, and Asbury would have been just an ordinary lay preacher.

5. *Asbury concocts a novel doctrine of apostolic succession that goes beyond Wesley or anyone else except the Popes.*

In 1813, as he neared the end of his career, Asbury wrote a pastoral letter to defend the episcopal system as the backbone of the Methodist movement in America—an ecclesiastical offspring so successful that it was rapidly surpassing its English parent. Asbury defended his own style of episcopacy by inverting its most common claim of an uninterrupted chain of apostolic succession. Following Wesley's lead, Asbury dismissed the "crooked, muddy succession" and chose to defend his own authority by linking it directly to the Apostolic Age, transcending the corruptions of the intervening centuries. He made explicit appeal to return to "the apostolic order of things," which had been lost in the first century, "when Church governments were adulterated and had much corruption attached to them." Here Asbury lops off two centuries more than Wesley did in dating the fall of the church into corruption. Asbury discounted Luther and Calvin, who "only beat off a part of the rubbish." He even discounts Wesley's efforts to reform the church in England. Supremely confident of his own divine call and mission, Asbury made a simple empirical appeal to the fact that the Methodists in America, more than any other church, had restored the "primitive order" of the New Testament—"the same doctrine, the same spirituality, the same power in ordinances [sacraments], in ordination, and in spirit." At Baltimore, in the state of Maryland, in the United States of America, "an apostolical form of Church government was formed" and an authentic episcopacy restored. To those who doubted the possibility of returning to former Apostolic days, Asbury replied, "we can; I say we must; yea, I say we have."<sup>6</sup> So, the true successor of Saints Peter and Paul is not the Pope in Rome, nor Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or even John Wesley, but "Saint" Francis of Baltimore. And the only true church in America and in the world is the Methodist Episcopal Church. Asbury is not timid in his claims for himself and for his church!

James O'Kelly (1757–1826), the first of many to decry American Methodism's dread hierarchy, denounced Asbury's unilateral and arbitrary decisions as tyranny and popery. Even Asbury's friends did not deny his autocratic tendencies. Devereux Jarratt (1732–1801) spoke of Asbury's strong passion for superiority and thirst for domination, and Nicholas Snethen (1769–1845), who worked to rebut O'Kelly, admitted that Asbury's devotion to duty left little room to accommodate flesh-and-blood people.

<sup>6</sup>Asbury, *Letters*, Vol. III, pp. 475–492; Letter to William McKendree; from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Thu., August 5, 1813.

6. *Asbury failed to follow Wesley's lead in tackling racism.*

Wesley bequeathed to the people called Methodists a strong commitment to abolish slavery and eliminate racism. His *Thoughts on Slavery* went beyond calling for an end of the enslavement of Africans to acknowledging their God-given dignity as persons of sacred worth and high intelligence. Asbury's commitment to end slavery and tackle racism wavered. When Methodism's rule against slavery blocked church growth in the south, Asbury favored accommodation to the culture. "Would not an *amelioration* in the condition of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans, than any attempt at emancipation?" he confided to his Journal January 29, 1809.

Wesley wrote to Asbury in 1787, deploring genocide of native peoples in America and urging him to establish missions among them as Moravians and others had already done.<sup>7</sup> Neither Coke nor Asbury felt deeply the obligation to organize systematic missionary work among Native Americans. The church's first mission to Native Americans was not established until 1819, three years after Asbury's death, when the Ohio Annual Conference approved a mission to the Wyandots at Upper Sandusky.

7. *Asbury fails to follow Wesley's example in creating new roles for women.*

Under Wesley's leadership, women in British Methodism began to take on new roles. From the formation of the first Methodist societies in 1739–1740, Wesley appointed women to the office of class leader. Following a pattern of the early church, he appointed other women to the office of deaconess—"visitors of the sick," he called them. And after the 1760s Wesley welcomed women into the ranks of lay preachers, and even licensed a few of them as itinerant preachers and appointed them to circuits. Little of this crossed the Atlantic. Asbury often expressed his deep appreciation for women of faith and appointed several women as class leaders. But there is no evidence that he appointed deaconesses or even licensed a woman to preach, let alone appointed her to a circuit.

8. *Asbury failed to appreciate Wesley's commitment to liturgical worship and eucharistic devotion in addition to less formal, more fervent worship in mass evangelistic settings, society preaching services, and small groups.*

Unable to administer the Lord's Supper until 1785, Asbury, like many Methodists, had learned to live without the Lord's Supper. From 1785 until 1792 Asbury averaged eight occasions a year in which he either took or celebrated communion, according to notations in his Journal. While this is high in comparison with the average frequency of communion among other denominations

<sup>7</sup>The *Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford* (Edited by John Telford; Standard Edition; London: The Epworth Press, J. Alfred Sharp, 1931), Vol. VIII, pp. 24–25; London; Sun., Nov. 25, 1787.

of the period, it is radically different from Wesley's practice and that of his growing British flock. Wesley averaged seventy-two communions a year or once in every five days in his later ministry. Clearly Asbury and Wesley have different views of the significance and role of the Lord's Supper in the life of a Methodist Christian.

In 1792, with Asbury's approval the General Conference officially abandoned most of Wesley's *Sunday Service* book, including the texts for Morning and Evening Prayer, the Litany, the calendar for the Christian Year, and the first part of the Lord's Supper (what we now call the Service of the Word).<sup>8</sup> In their place these simple directions "for uniformity in public worship among us, on the Lord's Day" were placed in the *Discipline*: "Let the morning-service consist of singing, prayer, the reading of one chapter out of the Old Testament, and another out of the New, and preaching." Similar directions were given for afternoon and evening services.

The text for the latter part of the Lord's Supper (what we now call the Service of the Table) was retained, though abbreviated. This left American Methodists with a flexible, oral Sunday service, well-suited to conditions on the frontier, rather than a fixed text, except when the Lord's Supper texts were added following a preaching service.

Either out of a personal reverence for the great influence for good that Wesley had brought to the church of his day, which Asbury stated with adulation in his *Journal* upon Wesley's death,<sup>9</sup> or from a wise political sense which he successfully exercised through his later career, Asbury chose to avoid direct confrontation with Wesley and patiently waited for the aging octogenarian to go to his heavenly reward. It is no coincidence that at the 1792 General Conference, the first to be convened after Wesley's death, we find Wesley's prayer book rejected and the sweeping liturgical reform found in the 1792 *Discipline*.<sup>10</sup>

Requiring that a prayer-book-style text be read as the Lord's Supper ritual made it less popular to Asbury and his Methodists because it was uncongenial to their oral culture and a jarring change of style from the informal preaching services they had come to love.

### Conclusion

Asbury remodeled the doctrines and discipline of Wesley in order to promote an indigenous revival in America's founding era. With its heavy emphasis on

<sup>8</sup>*The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America: With other Occasional Services*. London: 1784.

<sup>9</sup>Asbury, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 673; Fri., Apr. 29, 1791; John Wesley had died on Wed., Mar. 2 (1791).

<sup>10</sup>*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Revised and Approved at the General Conference Held at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, in November, 1792: In Which Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, Presided: Arranged under proper Heads, and Methodised in a more acceptable and easy Manner*. The Eighth Edition. Philadelphia: Printed by Parry Hall, and Sold by John Dickins, 1792.

"experience" and with an independent institutional structure, the new church and its new bishop nevertheless carried forward Wesley's dream of reforming the continent. Despite Asbury's adaptations of Wesley's plan and his failure to follow Wesley's advice on certain crucial issues, Wesley and his successors retained significant doctrinal authority and moral suasion. At least until Wesley's death in 1791, even Asbury acknowledged the importance of British precedent in preventing the movement from losing its form and unity, and the American church remained essentially true to Wesley's Methodism. Methodists everywhere were one people; they shared the same heritage, the same emphasis on spiritual revival, the same doctrines of salvation and grace, and the same mission to evangelize the world. Tensions would always exist between British and American Methodism, but these were family disputes that only reflected different strategies for enhancing the welfare of the common movement.



### Philip Gatch

(1751-1835)

PHILIP GATCH was born in Baltimore county, Md., March 2, 1751, and awakened to a sense of his lost condition in 1772, under a sermon of Nathan Perrigo, being the first ever preached by a Methodist in that neighbourhood, shortly after which he obtained a clear evidence of justification through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He began his itinerant labours under the superintendence of the Rev. Thomas Rankin in 1773, though his name did not appear on the printed Minutes until the Conference in Philadelphia in 1774. Brother Gatch was among the first native American Methodist preachers, and outlived all his early cotemporaries [*sic*] in the work. His travels were mostly in the states of New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, and performed in those days of peril which tried men's souls. In one instance he fell into the hands of a persecuting mob, which used tar freely upon him for preaching Christ and the resurrection; some of which being violently drawn across his naked eye-ball, well nigh destroyed it.—After his health was impaired by labour and exposure, he desisted from travelling, and lived sixteen years in Powhatan county, Virginia, and afterward five years in Buckingham county. From thence he emigrated to the Northwestern Territory, in the year 1798, and settled on Little Miami, a few miles east of Cincinnati, when that city was but a small village. In this new country Brother Gatch took an active and distinguished part, both as a local minister and as a citizen. He was re-admitted into the travelling connection in the latter part of his life, and placed in a superannuated relation to the Ohio Conference, in which relation he continued until death. His last sermon was preached the day he was eighty-four years old. He finished his course in great peace, and with an unshaken confidence in Christ, Sunday evening, the 28th of last December [1835], aged eighty-five years, lacking two months and five days.

*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829-1839; Volume II* (New-York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church; J. Collord, Printer; 1840); Minutes of Conferences [1835-1836]; p. 403.

## How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land?

*A sermon preached at  
Saint George's United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,  
Sunday, October 27, 1996,  
the 225th anniversary of Francis Asbury's arrival in America.*

Rev. Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.

*General Secretary, General Commission on Archives and History,  
The United Methodist Church*

How shall we sing the LORD's song  
in a foreign land?

Psalm 137:4 RSV

Anniversaries are important. They are reminders of who we are and from whence we have come. Most of them recall pleasant memories and are "party" events. We celebrate significant anniversaries such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries.

Today we observe an important anniversary for our church. Two hundred twenty-five years ago today, October 27, 1771, Francis Asbury arrived in Philadelphia from England. Why is Asbury's landing in Philadelphia of such consequence? Simply because he was the most noteworthy leader in the early history of American Methodism. He was its first elected bishop, its most well-known preacher and pastor, and one of its earliest historians. Asbury presided over its development from a movement to a church, guided it through some of its most difficult times, was its premier itinerant, and implemented the system of doctrine and discipline which John Wesley had created for the Methodist people.

Long before Asbury considered travel to the New World, he committed his life to Christ, entered the Methodist ministry, and became one of Wesley's most competent and trusted lay preachers. In 1771 he volunteered to go on mission to America. He believed God had called him to travel to the American colonies in order "to live to God, and to bring others so to do."<sup>1</sup> If God did not bless his work in America, he was resolved to return to England.

It is quite appropriate that United Methodists pause today to remember one of God's ambassadors and the chief founder of American Methodism—Francis Asbury. There are three observations to make about Asbury.

*First, Francis Asbury was a risk-taker.* None of us knows what it was like to cross the Atlantic Ocean in the eighteenth century. We think of a six-hour flight

between JFK or Philadelphia International and Gatwick or Heathrow Airports near London. Or maybe a few days on a luxury liner from New York with lots of good food and recreation. It was not that way for an eighteenth-century traveler. It usually involved a voyage of about eight weeks of difficult sailing with the attendant threats of storms and high seas. There was little in the way of recreation and not much of the food, beverages, and fresh water to which we are accustomed. One did not expect to be comfortable when sailing to America.

On Sunday, September 15, 1771, ten days out of port, Asbury preached a sermon on Acts 17:30.<sup>2</sup> He also recorded the following in his Journal:

The wind blowing a gale, the ship turned up and down, and from side to side, in a manner very painful to one that was not accustomed to sailing; but when Jesus is in the ship all is well. . . .

Our friends had forgotten our beds, or else did not know we should want such things; so I had two blankets for mine. I found it hard to lodge on little more than boards. I want faith, courage, patience, meekness, love. When others suffer so much for their temporal interests, surely I may suffer a little for the glory of God, and the good of souls.<sup>3</sup>

It was risky business to cross the Atlantic in the eighteenth century.

And what would one find here upon arrival? That, too, must have been a question that produced anxiety in the mind of the traveler. How would he be welcomed? Where would he stay? There were no Ramadas or Holiday Inns! What and where would he eat? There were no fast foods or diners! Would he make friends? Would he be safe? The questions were countless for those who, like Asbury, made the long voyage. The whole venture was risky business.

We too are risk-takers. Some of our risks are slight. Is the food we eat edible and wholesome? When we walk down a set of stairs, will they collapse? Will we trip? Some risks are more serious. We enter into marriage. Will it work? Will we make each other happy? We invest for retirement. Are our investments wise and secure? We are constantly taking risks.

Perhaps we don't usually think about risk-taking in relation to our Christian faith. We serve a risk-taking God. God took a risk in creation. God created human community and gave us freedom. Would it work? God elected Israel to be a special people through whom all the world's people would be blessed. Would they be faithful? God came among us in Jesus Christ. Would he be honored and attended as he deserved? God took a risk in becoming human in Christ.

God bids us to take a risk. Doesn't faith involve a risk? God asks for our trust. However, we are not asked to have "blind faith." We are to trust the One who has told us who he is and showed us his design and power in the history of Israel and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Other risks follow. We are to engage in a life of discipleship and holiness, in loving and caring for others, in

<sup>1</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 4; Thu., Sept. 12, 1771; on board ship from the Port of Pill (near Bristol), England, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup>"... but [God] now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

<sup>3</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 5.

speaking out against evil and injustice. Our words and acts will sometimes be misinterpreted, and even rejected, by others. Practicing the faith will involve us in risk-taking. Like Francis Asbury, we are invited to be risk-takers.

*Second, Francis Asbury was a stranger in a foreign land.* There is a similarity between the Psalmist and Asbury. Both were immigrants. There is a major difference between them. The Psalm writer was a member of a community in forced exile. He was in a foreign land against his will. Asbury was a volunteer on mission who had chosen to leave his native country for the colonies. Nevertheless, both were strangers in a foreign land.

It must be exceptionally difficult to be in a foreign land against your will. We think about Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were taken against their will to Babylon. There they were given foreign food to eat. New names were assigned them. They were forced to learn a new language. They had been taken away from everything familiar. Family and friends were left behind. There was a systematic attempt to destroy their identities and to induct them into a foreign culture.

Asbury's experience was much different. It was *his* decision to come to America. But his anxiety level must have been high. He was a stranger in a foreign land. How would he sing the Lord's song there? As a person of faith, have you ever felt like a stranger? We don't have to go to a foreign land to feel like an outsider. One can simply read the morning paper or watch the eleven o'clock news and think that he or she is in a strange and dangerous place. Some have observed that Christians today, regardless of their nationality, may feel like "resident aliens," speaking about faith in God to those who couldn't care less, advocating for peace and justice when many people are simply concerned about their own status and comfort. This is the Lord's song and there are, of course, many dimensions to it.

Note what happened to Asbury. He noted in his Journal for Sunday, October 27, 1771, that he went to Saint George's Church in Philadelphia. Pilmoor preached. Asbury explained, "The people looked on us with pleasure, hardly knowing how to show their love sufficiently, bidding us welcome with fervent affection, and receiving us as angels of God."<sup>4</sup>

We need each other. It may be that we must sing the Lord's song as a solo, but in most cases we are privileged to sing it as a choir, a choir of diverse voices. We will sing not only as sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses, but as people of different races, nationalities, genders, talents, and gifts. The question facing us, as Asbury, is: How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

*Finally*, it is obvious from his own reflections that *Asbury was a person sustained by God's grace*. He understood that he could not remain faithful and do God's will using only his own energy and resources. He certainly knew what he believed

<sup>4</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 7.

God intended for his life. His Journal records his intention: "When I came near the American shore, my very heart melted within me, to think from whence I came, where I was going, and what I was going about."<sup>5</sup> But how was he going to accomplish this? Wisely, he knew he had to lean on God to be both faithful and effective as a witness for Christ. He wrote: "I find my mind drawn heavenward. The Lord hath helped me by his power, and my soul is in a paradise. May God Almighty keep me as the apple of his eye, till all the storms of life are past! Whatever I do, wherever I go, may I never sin against God, but always do those things that please him."<sup>6</sup> And storms there were!

Asbury's comment reminds us of the Charles Tindley hymn, "Stand by Me":<sup>7</sup>

When the storms of life are raging,  
Stand by me;

When the storms of life are raging,  
Stand by me.

When the world is tossing me,  
Like a ship upon the sea,  
Thou who rulest wind and water,  
Stand by me.

In the midst of tribulation,  
Stand by me;

In the midst of tribulation,  
Stand by me.

When the hosts of hell assail,  
And my strength begins to fail,  
Thou who never lost a battle,  
Stand by me.

In the midst of faults and failures,  
Stand by me;

In the midst of faults and failures,  
Stand by me.

When I've done the best I can,  
And my friends misunderstand,  
Thou who knowest all about me,  
Stand by me.

In the midst of persecution,  
Stand by me;

In the midst of persecution,  
Stand by me.

<sup>5</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 7; Sun., Oct. 27, 1771; Philadelphia.

<sup>6</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 7; Sat., Nov. 2, 1771.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933), "Stand by Me"; from *Songs of Paradise*, ca. 1905.



When my foes in war array  
Undertake to stop my way,  
Thou who saved Paul and Silas,  
Stand by me.

When I'm growing old and feeble,  
Stand by me;  
When I'm growing old and feeble,  
Stand by me.

When my life becomes a burden,  
And I'm nearing chilly Jordan,  
O thou Lily of the Valley,  
Stand by me.

Where did Asbury find the sustaining grace that enabled him to stand? Certainly in worship. He noted in his Journal his constant attention to singing, preaching, and praying. Not only did he attend worship at Saint George's upon landing in America, but a few days later he noted, "We held a watch-night."<sup>8</sup> The study of the Bible was another way by which God's grace sustained him in the high and low moments of his ministry. And who can dismiss the importance of fellowship with other Christians? or the Lord's Supper with its emphasis on remembering, anticipating, and receiving the maintaining grace of God?

Asbury also discovered God's grace in his ministry to others. He wrote on one occasion: "I was sent for to visit two persons who were under conviction for sin. I spoke a word of consolation to them, and have hopes that God will set their souls at liberty. My own mind is fixed on God: he hath helped me. Glory be to him that liveth and abideth forever!"<sup>9</sup> In serving others, Asbury experienced the grace of God in his own life.

Francis Asbury learned to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. And by the grace of God, he sang it well! Today we are given the opportunity to sing the Lord's song with others in what we say and do. May God give us grace to sing faithfully and effectively.



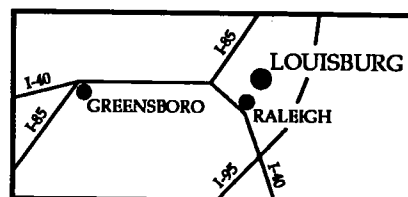
<sup>8</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 7; Sun., Nov. 3, 1771.

<sup>9</sup>Asbury, Journal, Vol. I, p. 7; Mon., Nov. 4, 1771.

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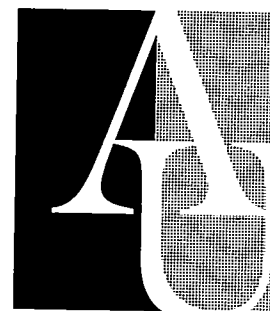
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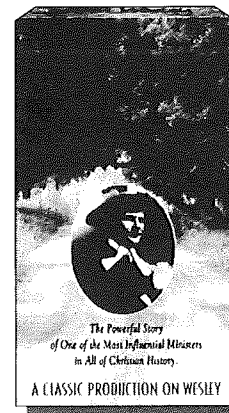
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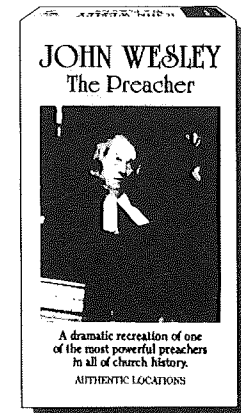
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